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# Identity, interest and action

A cultural explanation  
of Sweden's  
intervention in the  
Thirty Years War

Erik Ringmar

## Acknowledgements

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This book discusses, among other things, how we go about making sense of the worlds in which we live. As I will argue, the senses we make are always made together with others. This conclusion, naturally, applies also to this book itself. The senses I make in the pages that follow were originally made in conversation with a number of colleagues and friends. I hereby acknowledge my intellectual debts to Jeffrey Alexander, Jens Bartelson, Ragnar Björk, Stefan Björklund, Walter Carlsnaes, Sverker Gustavsson, Michael Halberstam, Jörgen Hermansson, Éva Hoós, Kurt Johannesson, Charles Lindblom, Veronica Muñoz Dardé, Sverker Oredsson, Alessandro Pizzorno, Diane Pranzo, Peter Rinderle, Bruce Russett, James Scott, Peggy Somers, Alexander Wendt and Björn Wittrock. I am particularly grateful to Jeff Alexander and to my teachers – Alex Wendt and Jim Scott at Yale, Alessandro Pizzorno in Florence – for recognising me as the kind of scholar which this study also introduces. Recognition, as we are about to see, is something for which we must sometimes be prepared to fight.

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## Introduction: the beginning of the story

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Why are there wars? Why have human beings in practically all times and places seen it fit to kill each other, not just on an individual and one-on-one basis, but as a matter of official policy, backed up by the full resources of a community, a city or a state? And why has war participation often been regarded, not as a moral wrong, not even as a necessary evil, but as a heroic, glorious, enterprise? The answer to questions such as these may seem easy enough to find once we remember that wars in a certain respect are similar to games, namely occasions on which things can be won and lost. Statesmen, just like prospective game players, conclude that on balance they may stand to benefit from participation, and once this conclusion has been reached they simply act upon it. States go to war since going to war is *in their interest* to do; states act *rationally*, in order to maximise their gains or in order to minimise their losses.

On second thought, however, this rationalistic answer may not be entirely convincing. As any historian is able to tell us, the forces unleashed in a war are inherently difficult to assess beforehand: alliances shift, morale falters, rapid technological changes cause rapid transformations in the balance of power. Similarly the risks involved in a war are invariably high: a regime may be overthrown if defeated, the country may be invaded and occupied. As a result gains and losses from a potential war participation are often next to impossible to calculate in advance, and under such conditions it is simply very difficult to settle on a rational course of action.

This conclusion is further reinforced if the participation in war is viewed not from the perspective of the state, but from the perspective of the individuals, the soldiers, who are to do the actual fighting. If war participation for the state is difficult to calculate in a rational manner, war participation for each individual is often nothing short of senseless. Wars are matters of life and death, after all, and not the kinds of things in which we normally

engage freely. As a consequence of a war we may not just win or lose utility, but also our lives, and it is difficult to see how any potential benefits can convince us to run this risk.

So why, then, do people go? How can statesmen rely on the loyalty of their citizens, and how can individual soldiers motivate themselves to leave for the front? And most importantly for our purposes: how are scholars to explain the outbreak of war? How can historians and social scientists make sense of actions which might not have made any sense to the people who performed them? In reply to this last question two ready-made replies have traditionally been invoked: that people go to war because they are coerced into doing so, or because they stand to gain monetary or other rewards from it. There may of course be something to both of these answers. Soldiers do no doubt sometimes fight because they have to and sometimes also because of the economic benefits they may reap. Yet carrots and sticks are hardly sufficient in and of themselves. Pure coercion cannot sustain a prolonged war effort, and whenever there is a real possibility of losing one's life it is difficult to justify war participation by the spoils it may bring. There must surely be better ways of securing one's life and one's property than warfare, and if this is the case, there must also be better ways for historians and social scientists to explain its occurrence.<sup>1</sup>

Once we have reached these conclusions we may perhaps be tempted to regard wars as inherently irrational enterprises. Perhaps statesmen engage in them only because they have miscalculated their interests, overestimated the benefits of war and underestimated the risks. Perhaps the individuals who go off happily to the fronts are dupes, indoctrinated by official propaganda, or perhaps driven by a death-wish or by a subconscious desire to kill. To call war participation irrational, however, is not to explain it, but rather to decide *not* to explain it. If we take rationality as the norm by which actions are to be measured, then irrational actions become, by definition, abnormal and incomprehensible. As long as rationality is allowed to provide the rule, irrationality will provide the exception: irrationality becomes a residual factor which we invoke only when our explanations fail.

Yet, and as I will argue at length below, there is another possibility. The fact that wars appear as irrational may in fact tell us very little about the stupidity or unreasonableness of human beings and very much about the limits of our contemporary explanatory accounts. The deficiency, in other words, may rest not with the soldiers or with those who order them into battle, but rather with the scholars who attempt to explain these actions. More concretely: the problem may rest with the very model – the rational choice model – through which actions like wars have traditionally been explained. The best way to show that this is indeed the case is to come up

with a different – a non-rationalistic – model and to demonstrate that actions which rationalism was unable to account for can be explained in terms of it. The most general aim of this book is to do precisely this. I will introduce an alternative theory of action and go on to use it in order to explain puzzling actions such as wars. As I hope to show, my explanation succeeds where the traditional, rationalistic, model fails.

At the core of this alternative theory stands the suggestion that people act not only in order to win things, but also in order to defend a certain conception of who they are. We act, that is, not only because there are things we want to have, but also because there are persons we want to *be*. In fact, this latter kind of actions must be the more fundamental since it only is *as someone* that we can have an interest in *some-thing*. Without this 'someone' there would simply not be anyone around for whom something could, or could not, be an interest. Actions undertaken in order to establish this someone are thus the more basic and they cannot be redescribed in rationalistic terms – calculations of utility gains and utility losses can make no sense until they can be attached to a certain person.

It is very common, we noted above, to compare actions with moves in a game. Just as the participants in a game, human beings allegedly do what they do because of the payoff's the prospective action may bring. What this rationalistic interpretation overlooks, however, is the simple fact that people generally do not play games in order to win things. While most games certainly may offer a prize of some kind to the winner – a trophy, a medal or a king's daughter – these prizes are more often than not mere pretexts for engaging in the game in the first place. Given the high costs involved in the practising of many sports, the slim chances of winning at a lottery, or the risks involved in the slaying of dragons, pursuits like these are not likely to yield much profit. In utilitarian terms the game is very rarely worth the candle.

Why, then, if not for rationalistic reasons, do we play? Although there are no doubt many answers to this question, it is worth underlining the obvious, yet easily neglected, fact that we participate in games because we want to excel over others.<sup>2</sup> Winning *as such* is what is important, not whatever additional rewards winning might bring. And why, then, do people want to win? Simply put: because winning is desired by others; we want to win because others want to win. By winning we can manifest our superiority; we become 'winners', and everyone else is forced to recognise us as such. Even if we cannot all win, however, just participating in a game is often important enough. By participating we can assume a certain role and abide by a certain set of rules, and in this way present ourselves as persons of a

certain kind.<sup>3</sup> To wit: games do not generally concern utility payoffs, but instead questions of *identities*, and people do not generally engage in them because of what they can win, but instead because of who or what the game allows them to be.<sup>4</sup>

Looked at as a problem concerning identities rather than utilities, the puzzle concerning war participation becomes easier to solve. For war to make sense from each individual's point of view, those individuals must see themselves as living in the kind of societies where they can make sense of their lives; there must be a life worth living and a life for which they are prepared to die. If this is the case – or if the official war propaganda is able to convince them that this is the case – it may indeed be necessary to resist a military threat. If the enemy is sufficiently alien and sufficiently powerful, it is possible that a defeat and an invasion may alter us, turn us into someone we are not. As some future, potential, selves, we may perhaps enjoy life under Communism, Nazism or Shiite Islam, but for us today those future selves may just as well be different persons. There is no point outside of our present identity from which a future, radically alien, identity can be judged. The present self is the only standard by which life can be measured and if we do not fight for who we are nothing else will ever make sense.<sup>5</sup> Hence, as long as we are loyal to our communities and identify ourselves in relation to them, we may have no other choice and very little bargaining power *vis-à-vis* our political and military authorities. We act, not in defence of our interests, but in defence of our identity.

### Sweden goes to war

Theoretical arguments, when presented alone, often fail to persuade. Although we may perhaps be convinced in the abstract, we cannot really tell what difference a certain theoretical perspective makes until we have come to incorporate it as a part of the intellectual framework through which we normally interpret our lives. For this more radical – more practical – conversion to take place we typically need to illustrate the abstract argument with the help of some concrete example or case study. The aim of the second part of this book is to do precisely this: I will explain why Sweden went to war against the armies of the Habsburg emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in the year 1630. As I will argue, all previous scholars who have explained the Swedish intervention have done so in rationalistic terms, but as I will show, such explanations overlook the most important aspects of the war. A focus on interests alone cannot explain the Swedish decision to intervene; for that we need an explanation which is able to focus also on questions of identities.

But why should we study this long-forgotten war rather than some other, more recent, conflict? Why should a potential reader accept an invitation to explore why Sweden went to war in 1630? This is an important question, of course, but before I address it, let me briefly introduce the Swedish case study.

On 26 June 1630 a first contingent of Swedish troops under the command of king Gustav II Adolf landed on the island of Usedom on the northern coast of Germany. A month later they were joined by the rest of the army, bringing its total to 12,000 men. The Swedish intervention into the German War – what historians later were to refer to as the ‘Thirty Years War’ – was a fact. Sweden had joined the Protestant side in the great conflagration which had set the new religion against the old and which already for twelve years had wreaked enormous damage on the European continent. The Swedish king had pitted his country against the military might of the Holy Roman Emperor in Vienna.<sup>6</sup>

The most immediate problem facing the Swedish army in the summer of 1630 was how to gain a foothold on German territory. Luckily there were not many Imperial forces in the province of Pomerania where they had landed, but the Swedes were very short of supplies and their king was greeted with suspicion and hostility in all quarters. Yet the Swedish army was too large to be fed in the small coastal area it had occupied; they had to move forward even at the risk of antagonising one or another of the multitude of princes, bishops, archbishops, palsgraves, margraves, landgraves, counts, viscounts, dukes and archdukes who constituted the political mosaic which was the Holy Roman Empire. The Swedish army occupied the town of Stettin and established itself on both sides of the river Oder.

Later the same summer, Sweden acquired its first allies. On 1 August, Gustav Adolf concluded a treaty with Magdeburg, a Protestant city which only a year before had survived a protracted siege by the Imperial general Albrecht von Wallenstein. Later in August the count of Pomerania also joined the Swedish side. Yet this was not, properly speaking, a diplomatic break-through for the Swedes. The Pomeranians had been won over only at gun point and relations between the Swedish king and the rest of the Protestant princes in Germany were to remain troubled throughout the course of the war. While the German Protestants no doubt regarded the invasion of their Swedish co-religionists as a unique opportunity to extort privileges from the Catholic emperor, they also mistrusted the Swedes: they were suspicious of Gustav Adolf’s intentions, feared the reaction of their Catholic neighbours, and balked at the prospective presence of a Swedish



army which in large part would have to be clothed, fed and housed with the help of the resources of Protestant German lands. When the German Protestants met in Leipzig in February 1631, Johann Georg of Saxony – the leading Protestant prince in Germany at the time – declared that he was not prepared to join any arrangement which could be regarded as hostile to the empire.

When the military campaign began in the spring of 1631 the Swedes encountered their first serious adversary: Jean Tilly, the Imperial general who had fought, and thoroughly defeated, the rebellious Protestants in Bohemia in the early 1620s. General Tilly's first major military action was to lay a siege on the city of Magdeburg, the Swedish ally. On 10 May, the citizens of Magdeburg were forced to surrender and in the confusion which followed the city was swept by a conflagration in which 20,000 persons were killed. The disaster was a military setback and a great humiliation to the Swedes. During the months which followed, however, Gustav Adolf discovered – much to his own surprise – that the situation had improved. Tilly moved out of Magdeburg and turned to the east, and as a consequence the Swedes suddenly found themselves in something of a military vacuum. Gustav Adolf was not slow in seizing the opportunity: at the end of June he moved out of the Brandenburg region, took Tangermünde, moved across the river Elbe and proceeded to construct a huge fortified camp at Werben. This rapid campaign was a turning-point in the war. It was a turning-point for the Swedes since they now, for the first time, had moved out of the Baltic coastal lands and into a new supply area in central Germany, but also for the German Protestants – and the recalcitrant Elector of Saxony – who now began taking a more positive view of Gustav Adolf's project. Also the prestige of Saxony had suffered as a result of the fall of Magdeburg, and in the wake of the disaster it had become increasingly obvious that Johann Georg's previous policy of neutrality and moderation was impossible to sustain. On 2 September, Sweden and Saxony concluded an alliance 'for as long as the danger from the enemy shall continue'.<sup>7</sup>

The Swedish army, reinforced by Saxon troops, marched on to meet Tilly's forces, and on 9 September 1631 the two armies met at Breitenfeld. It was a spectacular battle and a spectacular victory for Gustav Adolf, for Sweden and for the Protestant cause. When night fell, the Imperial army was completely defeated and the invincible general Tilly was on the run. Church bells celebrated the event, we are told, all over Protestant lands and even as far away as in Moscow. As a result of the victory, Gustav Adolf's position improved dramatically. For a while he considered pursuing Tilly's fleeing troops by marching directly on Vienna, but he eventually settled on

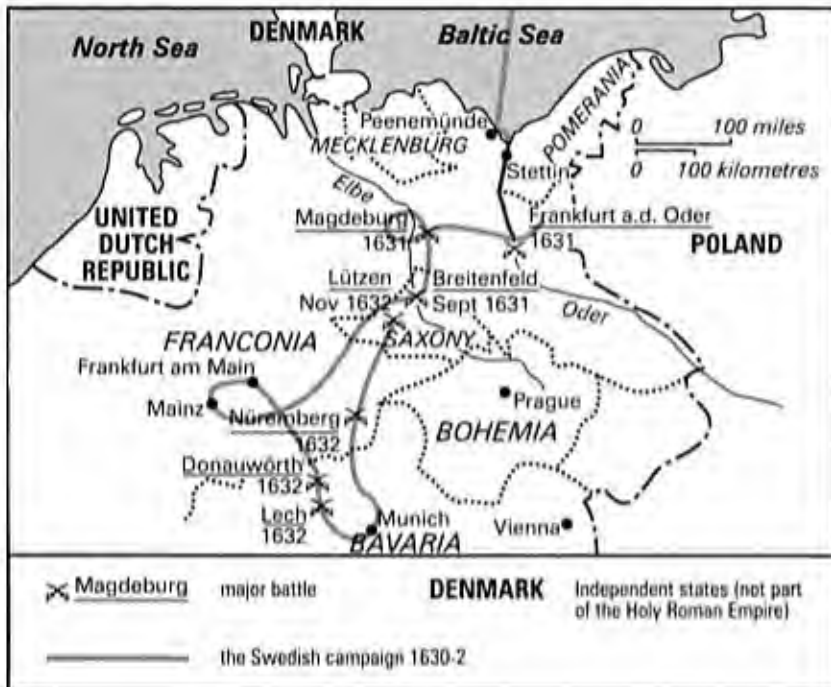


Figure 1 The Swedish intervention, 1630-2

a more cautious course and turned his troops to Franconia, a rich area in western Germany previously untouched by the war. The Swedes entered Würzburg on 4 October, Frankfurt on 17 November, Worms on 7 December and Mainz on 12 December, where they settled for the winter.

At the winter headquarters Gustav Adolf kept court like a new emperor. He received delegations from all over German territory and began to draw up plans for a Protestant union – a *corpus evangelicum* – which could guarantee himself and Sweden a permanent influence in German affairs. Yet his plans also took on a wider, all-European, scope: Swedish agents drafted alliances with potential anti-Habsburg powers wherever they could be found – Gustav Adolf received missions from the ruler of Transylvania, the Khan of the Crimean Tartars, and he even dispatched an embassy to the Sultan. King Gustav Adolf was suddenly the most powerful man in Europe. There was something extraordinary – even miraculous – about this unexpected shift of fortunes, and not surprisingly a number of legends came to be associated with the Swedish king. Gustav Adolf was the ‘lion from the north’ who had appeared in the prophecies of Paracelsus, the



sixteenth-century physician and necromancer; Gustav Adolf was the 'storm from the north' which Ezekiel had foreseen two thousand years earlier. His latinised name (Gustavus), somebody discovered, was an anagram of Augustus, the first Roman emperor who had ruled the world.<sup>8</sup>

The Swedish objective for the military campaign of 1632 was nothing but total victory. Gustav Adolf would, as he put it, 'clip the wings of the Imperialists so that they shall not fly again'; the only acceptable peace, according to Axel Oxenstierna, the Swedish chancellor, was a peace 'with our foot on their neck and a knife at their throat'.<sup>9</sup> The plan was to move rapidly through Bavaria, to crush the Habsburg armies in the emperor's hereditary lands and then to capture Vienna itself. Yet, as it would turn out, the campaign of 1632 was much more difficult than the previous year's. Forced to strengthen his defences, the Habsburg emperor had turned to the legendary – but also notoriously independent-minded – general Albrecht von Wallenstein for help. Wallenstein was reinstated as head of the second Austrian army and he soon began recruiting and training troops in Bohemia. Although this posed no direct challenge to Gustav Adolf's army in the south, it did threaten the heart of the Swedish position in the province of Thuringia, as well as Saxony, Sweden's new ally. In an attempt to relieve pressure on these positions and incite Wallenstein to move south, the Swedes occupied Nuremberg, Augsburg and Munich and laid waste to much of the Bavarian countryside. Yet Wallenstein refused to leave his position. At the end of the summer Gustav Adolf suddenly received news that the Protestant position in the north was under attack and he decided to march to their rescue.

The first major engagement between the Swedish and the Imperial armies took place at the small Saxon village of Lützen on 6 November 1632. Gustav Adolf had surprised Wallenstein with his sudden appearance on the Saxon theatre and, as the king was aware, some of the Imperial forces had temporarily been scattered. Yet a direct attack on Wallenstein's position proved to be impossible: the morning of 6 November was very foggy and only by noon were military operations practicable. As soon as Gustav Adolf gave the order, however, the centre of the Swedish army went on the offensive while the Swedish left wing launched an attack on the Habsburgs' right. Soon a panic flight developed among the Imperial troops which threatened a large section of their forces with disintegration. The battle seemed as good as over. At this point, however, the mist came down again, and this concealed the extent of the Swedish advantage. In the confusion the Swedish left wing suddenly ran into tough resistance, and in an effort to relieve them king Gustav Adolf took personal command of a cavalry regiment which he launched upon the enemy. Almost immediately,

however, the king was hit. An Austrian horseman fired a pistol in his back, he fell from the saddle, and as he lay face downward in the mud a final shot through the head ended his life. After a long day of intense fighting the Swedes had won the battle, but no victory could make up for the fact that the king was dead. 'May God console us poor Swedish men', as Gabriel Oxenstierna put it in a letter to his brother Axel, the chancellor, 'who have lost this dear and precious pearl of our fatherland'.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the death of the king, however, the Swedish engagement in Germany did continue. Chancellor Oxenstierna, who was a highly skilled administrator, looked after the Pomeranian province in the north and reinforced the Swedish diplomatic network, and a number of very resourceful Swedish generals continued the military campaigns, often with considerable success. Yet the momentum was gone. After the death of the king, the German Protestants were less than enthusiastic about supporting a Swedish-dominated security system, and the Swedish war-machine was difficult to maintain in a Germany increasingly ravaged by war. The Swedes were no longer powerful enough to impose their will through military means – a conclusion only reinforced by the battle of Nördlingen, August 1634, at which the Swedish army suffered a humiliating defeat. By 1638 it was clear that Sweden could hope to fight its way to acceptable peace terms only with the aid of foreign mercenaries paid for by subsidies provided by Cardinal Richelieu's government in France.

If we turn away from the chronology of the 'German War' – the 'Thirty Years War' – and look instead at the consequences it brought, these can be summarised in a number of different ways. For Sweden, first of all, the war meant that the country secured its sovereignty and an officially recognised place as a legitimate member of the community of European states. In fact, it achieved much more than this: when the peace treaty was finally signed in Westphalia in 1648, Sweden was generally regarded as a major political power and as one of the principal players in European politics. As far as Germany was concerned, the war brought an unprecedented destruction of crops, a complete devastation of large parts of the country, and untold suffering to millions of people. The Thirty Years War, we could say, was the first modern – the first 'total' – war. In political terms, the Westphalian settlement reaffirmed German disunity: by strengthening the Protestant princes and their relative independence at the expense of the hegemonic position of the empire, a unification of the country from Vienna, and under Catholicism, was precluded. This failure would continue to be an important theme of European politics during the following centuries and a source of embarrassment to later generations of German nationalists.

In somewhat more abstract and general terms we could perhaps say that the military, political and ideological bankruptcy of the empire contributed to a radical reformulation of the very categories through which politics was analysed and understood. Throughout the Middle Ages the post-Roman myth of the empire still played an important role. Just as there was only one religious community governed by one church, there was, according to this mythology, only one political community governed by one ruler. As a consequence of the Thirty Years War, however, this mythology was shattered. From Westphalia and onwards, the *state* was instead the only legitimate political entity; states were governed by rulers who declared themselves 'sovereign', acknowledging no rival authorities above them and none below. Around the state a new kind of political life began to develop, and also a new kind of world – *inter-national* – politics. This is the 'modern age' and the 'modern world' of which we ourselves are still a part. No, the Swedish intervention of 1630 did not by itself bring about this transformation – it was *not* its sole cause – but with 350 years of hindsight we can conclude that it did contribute to this outcome and that, at any rate, it is a very good symbol of it.

### Why did Sweden go to war in 1630?

Although the Swedish intervention into the Thirty Years War can thus be shown to have had a number of important, far-reaching, consequences, no discussion regarding consequences alone will ever answer the question of why Sweden went to war *in the first place*. On the contrary, any attempt at a posterior rationalisation will inevitably risk hiding the possible anterior irrationality of the whole enterprise. In fact, and as even the most superficial study will reveal, there were several strong reasons for early-seventeenth-century Sweden *not* to engage in a continental war of this magnitude. The country was too poor and too economically backward, first of all; its population was not large enough and the country lacked the man-power and the potential soldiers. There was, furthermore, no socio-economic base for imperialism: Sweden had no large cities except for Stockholm, no middle class, few skilled administrators and an aristocratic class which by European standards was exceptionally small. Indeed geography itself seemed to condemn Sweden to a peripheral role on the world stage: the country was pent up in a remote corner of Europe; it had no stakes in European affairs; no glorious history to defend and no important dynastic ties to any of the combatants on the continent. And perhaps most importantly of all: at the time of the intervention the country had no allies and no financial support from any quarter. The other Protestant states –

Denmark, the United Dutch Republic and England – refused to be a party to Gustav Adolf's schemes, and the Protestant princes in Germany were, as we have seen, highly sceptical of their would-be benefactor. Early-seventeenth-century Sweden was simply not the kind of country which engaged in wars with foes as powerful as the Holy Roman Emperor in Vienna.

Yet, as we know, Sweden *did* go to war, and the reason why she did has puzzled not only the people contemporary to the event, but also each person who has subsequently turned his or her attention to it. There is something highly enigmatic about the Swedish intervention and it is perhaps not surprising that seventeenth-century popular culture often described the Swedish king in apocalyptic and millenarian terms, or for that matter, that later Protestant hagiographers saw him as an instrument of God, or that G. W. F. Hegel, for one, regarded him as a vehicle of the progress of the World Spirit.<sup>11</sup> In fact, even today's rather more level-headed historians grasp for similar metaphors.<sup>12</sup> Why indeed would this poor, economically backward and sparsely populated country on Europe's northern fringe ever decide to wage war against the Habsburg Emperor in Vienna, the mightiest ruler on the continent?

To say that there is an irrational, enigmatic, quality to the Swedish intervention is not to say that attempts have not been made to explain it. The exact opposite is the case. Just like a good murder mystery, the Swedish intervention has attracted, not repelled, investigators, and the reason why it was undertaken has been debated with much the same fervour as, say, the questions of why there was a French Revolution in 1789 or a world war in 1914.<sup>13</sup> If we go through these debates we will find three different kinds of explanations: 1) a religious explanation which tells us that Sweden went to war in order to defend its Protestant faith and its German co-religionists against the advancing forces of the Counter-Reformation; 2) a military explanation which tells us that the action was undertaken in order to defend the country against the threat of an Austrian invasion; 3) an economic explanation which sees the intervention as an attempt to expand the overseas market for Swedish products and to derive revenues and taxes from foreign trade. To these explanations presented by historians we could also add theories presented by contemporary social scientists. It is true, of course, that social scientists generally have paid very scant attention to this particular war, yet the scientific methodology they subscribe to does indicate that they might have something to say on the topic. The aim of the social scientists has characteristically been to come up with a theory that explains *all* wars – or at least all wars of a certain type – and if we only count the Swedish intervention as an instance of a more general category of wars, then we should be able to rely on scientific theory in order to explain it.

What are we to do when confronted with many different, perhaps contradictory, explanations of an event? Which among them is correct, or which one is better than which other? Ultimately only an investigation of the empirical facts of the matter can answer this question: we must turn to the primary source material and weigh the evidence for and against each alternative. Before we get to this stage in our investigation, however, there are a number of preliminary questions to be asked. We cannot merely be satisfied with the fact *that* a certain explanation explains something, but we must also find out *how* this explanation is achieved. We need to know which causal variables go with which others, why certain factors are brought in and not others, and under what circumstances certain assumptions can be expected to hold. By asking these more basic questions we are, however, no longer engaging in a historical or a scientific investigation of facts, but instead in an investigation of how those interpretations are constructed which the existence of facts presupposes. As I will argue, it is only through an investigation of the preconceptions which guided the work of previous scholars that we can criticise those preconceptions and come up with new, alternative, ways in which to organise our data.

As a *pre-empirical* investigation of this kind will show, historians and social scientists – despite their many differences – generally subscribe to one and the same theory of action: the notion that human beings are ‘rational’ and that their actions can be explained by reference to the ‘interests’ of the person or group who perform them. As both groups of scholars agree, people act in order to gain utility or in order to minimise loss; they do what they do because it is in their interest to do it. In both the historians’ and the social scientists’ version of it, the Swedish intervention was undertaken in order to gain utility for the country, its leader, or its leading classes; the country went to war in order to further its religious, military or economic interests.

Although all of these explanations may sound plausible, the only problem is that there is not enough evidence to support them. As a close reading of the primary sources will show, the Swedish action *cannot* straightforwardly be described as aiming toward utility gain, and although the country and its leaders certainly had religious, military and economic interests of various kinds, a defence of these interests was *not* what brought the country to war. Does this then mean that the intervention was irrational after all? That we should join sides with the occult scientists of the seventeenth century, with the Protestant hagiographers or with Hegel, and explain the action by reference to prophetic dreams or to entities like ‘God’ or the ‘World Spirit’? Before we reach any such conclusions we should perhaps remember something we said above: explanations which invoke



irrationality are not really an alternative class of explanations since they are necessarily parasitic upon rationality as a standard by which actions are judged. The rationality assumption *creates* irrationality as a residual factor, as it were, but there is no behaviour 'out there' in the world which is irrational as such. In fact, and as I will argue at length below, it is the rationality assumption embraced by modern scholars and no feature of early-seventeenth-century Sweden itself which has given the Swedish intervention its enigmatic character. Since modern scholars have been able to conceive of the action only in rationalistic terms, and since the rationalistic model plainly does not fit the historical material, the reason why Sweden went to war has simply been beyond the bounds of the scholars' imagination.

Why, then, did Sweden go to war in 1630? In order to provide an answer to this question we need a critique of the preconceptions upon which the modern theory of action rests. We must find a way of escaping the confines of the rationality/irrationality dichotomy and come up with an argument which demonstrates that people and states may act also for other – *non-*, or *a-rationalistic* – reasons. We need an alternative, and more complete, theory of action. The search for such a theory will keep us busy in the first part of the book, but for now let us be content by pointing out that the key feature of this theory is a move from a focus on interests to a focus on identities. The pursuit of interests is indeed an important reason for action, I will agree, but in order to answer a question regarding an interest we must first be able to answer a question regarding who or what we are. It is only *as some-one* that we can want *some-thing*, and it is only once we know who we *are* that we can know what we *want*. It follows that to the extent that questions regarding identities remain unsettled, rationalistic, interest-driven, explanations will fail.

Following G.W.F. Hegel and sociologists like George Herbert Mead and Alessandro Pizzorno, I will stress the social character of identities: people alone cannot decide who or what they are, but any such decision is always taken together with others. We need *recognition* for the persons we take ourselves to be, and only *as recognised* can we conclusively come to establish an identity. The quest for recognition will consequently come to occupy much of the time of people or groups who are uncertain regarding who they are. We all want to be taken seriously and be treated with respect; we all want to be recognised as the kinds of persons we claim to be. Yet recognition is rarely automatic and before we gain it we are often required to prove that our interpretations of ourselves indeed do fit us. In order to provide such proof we are often forced to *act* – we must *fight* in order to

convince people regarding the applicability of our self-descriptions. Actions undertaken for this reason are neither rational nor irrational in the sense in which modern scholars have used these concepts and they cannot be described in terms of a utility calculus since they are a *precondition* for a utility calculus to be possible in the first place. It is only as someone that we can want something and it is precisely this 'someone' that the action in question is designed to establish. It is an action undertaken, not in defence of an interest, but in defence of an identity.

Once viewed in the alternative light which our theoretical argument casts upon it the Swedish intervention will be very easy to explain. There is no high-falutin philosophical argument or fancy theoretical trick involved here – all we need to do is to reread the source material from the perspective which our alternative theory of action makes possible and we will find all the evidence we need in order to explain the intervention in a simple, straightforward and convincing manner. Sweden, I will conclude, did not go to war in defence of its national interests, but in defence of its national identity.

### **The beginning of the story**

Sweden is of course a country of only minor importance in world politics and the year 1630 is indeed quite remote. As a topic the Swedish intervention into the Thirty Years War has no obvious urgency and we may perhaps be prepared to let the scholars who care to study it pursue their interminable academic fights without us. Yet this would be a premature and unfortunate conclusion. The time in which the Swedish intervention took place is much closer to us than we commonly realise, and by studying this era I believe we can learn much, not only about the early seventeenth century, but also about our own time and our own selves.

The period which preceded the Swedish intervention – the Renaissance – was a time of great upheaval and transformation. It was a time when the Europeans discovered otherness both in the form of a long-lost Greek and Roman heritage, and – through the great geographical discoveries – in the form of new continents and peoples with cultures radically different from their own. As a result of these confrontations, the Europeans were able to attain new perspectives on themselves, and from these new perspectives it became possible for them to question themselves in a radically new fashion. In due course this questioning led to a break-down of much of the medieval intellectual order, to humanistic secularism, religious dissension and rationalistic thought. Yet this Renaissance spirit of intellectual discovery and confrontation was soon to weaken: by mid-seventeenth century – in the



period we today commonly refer to as 'the early modern era' – a new consensus emerged.<sup>14</sup> In philosophy the self-doubt of a Michel Montaigne gave way to the self-confidence of a René Descartes; in the sciences the wandering spirit of a Giordano Bruno was replaced by the stable convictions of an Isaac Newton; in politics the debating club which was the court of Urbino yielded to the absolutist court of a Louis XIV.

The very fact that we talk about the seventeenth century as 'the early modern era' points to the fact that we are dealing with a period which is very much like ours, yet also different from ours. It is a 'modern' era, to be sure, and thus a part of our own time, yet it is an 'early' version of this era, indicating that most of the features we today take for granted then existed only in a rudimentary form. The early modern era was the time in which many of the institutions, conceptual categories and frameworks were established which we still rely on in order to make sense of ourselves and our world. The early modern era is, we could say, the beginning of the story we today tell about ourselves.

Curiously enough, this story of ourselves has not only one, but *two* subjects, and there is a close, yet highly intriguing, relationship between the two: we tell the story of ourselves as individual subjects, but also the story of ourselves as a collective subject called 'the state'. Both of these subjects, man and state, understood as independent, self-governing, agents, did *not* exist as such in the Middle Ages and when they were introduced in the Renaissance they immediately came to attract an enormous amount of attention. What does it mean to be a 'man', philosophers, artists, scholars and laymen asked themselves, and what does it mean to live in, or govern, a 'state'? In reply a great number of treaties, handbooks, poems and orations were put together, thoroughly elaborated upon and debated. Yet this intellectual activity soon abated. It is not possible to *live* if one perpetually questions one's own identity, and by mid-seventeenth century people's attention soon turned to different concerns – identities were once again there to be *used* rather than to be worried about. During the following centuries the identities of man and state increasingly came to be taken as self-evident and non-problematic. The self was naturalised, we could say; man and state became unquestioned – and unquestionable – parts of a necessary social order.

During this century, however, we have increasingly returned to Renaissance concerns. Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and – more recently – a number of continental philosophers, have once again turned the nature of the individual subject into an enigma, while economic, technological and cultural transformations have made the existence, and status, of the state equally problematic. At the end of the twentieth century

we – just like the men and women of the Renaissance – are going through a period when traditional identities are in the process of breaking down and new identities in the process of being established. Today, just as during the Renaissance, questions of identities are matters of much private anxiety as well as intense public debate; once again we are asking ourselves what it might mean to be a ‘man’ and what it might mean to belong to, or govern, a ‘state’. This, naturally, puts us closer to the men and women of the Renaissance than all the men and women during the intervening three and a half centuries: we share a view of life and a predicament.

As we pointed out above, the Swedish intervention into the Thirty Years War contributed – although admittedly in a small way – to these radical transformations: it hastened the break-down of the medieval political order based on the pre-eminence of universal institutions like the church and the empire and it assisted in the rise of the sovereign state and the modern state system. Gustav Adolf and his fellow Swedes stood on the threshold to modernity, as it were, and they, and their contemporaries, took the steps that moved us into the political universe in which we have lived ever since. This, I believe, is the fundamental reason why a study of this time and this action is relevant to us today. If we, as we today sometimes believe, have come to the end of the story which we tell about our modern selves – man and state – we have good reasons to return to the beginning of this story and ask ourselves how it all began.

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## Historical and scientific explanations

Why did Sweden go to war in 1630?, we have asked, and before I proceed to give my own answer to this question we should investigate what previous scholars have said on the topic. Only once we know what has already been done in this field can we know what remains to be done, and only through a critique of previous approaches can a new approach be justified. There are two distinct bodies of scholarship which are relevant in this regard: the work of historians who specialise in Swedish, or European, seventeenth-century history, first of all, but also the work of social scientists who seek to formulate theories which address not this particular war, but war initiation in general. Let us begin with the historians.

### The historiographical menu

If our aim is to find an explanation for an event such as an old war what we most probably do is to turn to a historian for help. Historians have a reputation for being thorough, modest and objective, and as long as we rely on them we would seem to be in good hands. Yet, and as we are about to see, this suggestion provides no easy solution to our query since the historians who have written on our case have given us not only one, but many different – and often radically diverging – explanations of why Sweden went to war. Even if we have decided to trust the historians, in other words, the problem still remains *which historian to trust*.

In order to proceed here we should begin by reviewing our choices. Perhaps we could think of the many different explanations as entries on a historiographical menu from which we can pick the one explanation we find most appealing. If we take this to be our task, the Swedish historian Sverker Oredsson's recent book *Gustav Adolf, Sverige och trettioåriga kriget* is an invaluable guide. In this work Oredsson surveys the entire history of

the historiography of the intervention; he covers close to 350 years of history writing – 166 works all together – in Swedish, English, Danish, German, French, Russian and Latin.<sup>1</sup> In summarising his conclusion Oredsson points to eleven different explanations invoked by the historians over the years.<sup>2</sup> As they would have it, the intervention was undertaken either . . .

1. for the reasons enumerated in the War Manifesto published by the Swedish General Headquarters in 1630.
2. in defence of the Protestant faith.
3. in order to assure freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.
4. by king Gustav Adolf acting as an 'instrument of God or History'.
5. in order to 'save the German liberty'.
6. as a way to restore the European balance of power.
7. in order to assure the personal security of the king and his family.
8. in order to defend the country against military threats posed by the Habsburgs.
9. out of 'expansionism'.
10. in order to gain economic benefits for the country.
11. in order to gain economic benefits for the feudal class.

For the purpose of our own presentation it should be possible to organise these eleven explanations into three main groups: explanations phrased in terms of (i) religious/ideational factors (explanations 2, 3, 4 and 5); (ii) military/political factors (6, 7, 8 and 9); (iii) or economic/socio-economic factors (explanations 10 and 11). Let us go through each of these main explanations and summarise the arguments which can be adduced in their support.

Religion and other ideational factors have been emphasised by no fewer than 82 of the 166 writers in Oredsson's survey.<sup>3</sup> According to the most common version, Sweden intervened in order to defend the Protestant religion which was threatened not only in Germany, but also in Sweden and in the rest of the world (explanation 2). This explanation seems to have been particularly popular at the end of the eighteenth century when a number of writers and philosophers started analysing the role that ideas played in stirring people into action. The effect of the Reformation, as Edmund Burke put it, 'was to introduce other interests into all countries than those which arose from their locality and natural circumstances'.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, a new type of war, the war of ideas, replaced the old types of wars fought for more mundane and particular concerns. According to Friedrich Schiller, 'It was the Reformation which first drew the northern powers, Sweden and

Denmark, into the political system of Europe; the assistance of those two kingdoms having become indispensable to the Protestant powers.<sup>5</sup>

Few would have voluntarily taken up arms for the interests of the prince of the state; but for religion, the merchants, the farmer, the artisan, readily armed themselves; while they would have murmured against the smallest extraordinary impositions for the prince or the state, they readily embarked their lives and fortunes in the cause of religion.<sup>6</sup>

While few twentieth-century historians have attributed as much importance to the defence of religion as a cause of the war, contemporary authors do point to the role that religion played in the official Swedish war propaganda: king Gustav Adolf, they tell us, used the defence of Protestantism as a means of uniting the country behind himself and his own interpretation of the world.<sup>7</sup>

Did Sweden, or perhaps Gustav Adolf personally, try to restore freedom of conscience and religion in Germany (explanation 3)? Or was the aim perhaps to protect the 'German liberty' – the political and religious independence of the many small principalities which constituted the Holy German Empire (explanation 5)? Many nationalistic and idealistically inclined historians of the nineteenth century thought that this was the case, and these factors are still emphasised today, especially in German historiography.<sup>8</sup> As far as the notion of the 'German liberty' goes, however, there are two radically different interpretations. According to the German historian Günter Barudio, Sweden went to war, altruistically, for the sake of 'die Teutsche Freiheit', and Gustav Adolf's ambitions for himself and his country were always limited. According to Sigmund Goetze, on the other hand, the liberty that the Swedes sought to protect was their own liberty to invade and dominate a weak and divided southern neighbour.<sup>9</sup> Was the king and his army, then, an 'instrument of God' or perhaps of 'History' (explanation 4)? Again, this explanation is a nineteenth-century favourite. In the drama *Gustaf Adolf* by the Swedish playwright August Strindberg, for example, we find the king portrayed – in quasi-hegelian fashion – as an instrument of world-historical forces quite beyond his own conscious control.<sup>10</sup>

Turning next to historians who have emphasised military and political factors behind the intervention, we find 122 names. In its most common version this argument points to the military threat which the armies of the Holy Roman Empire posed to Sweden. By the end of the 1620s, the Habsburgs had not only occupied parts of Denmark and several cities on the northern German coast, but also started making plans for a Baltic fleet and a naval base at the northern German city of Wismar. From this position, these historians have argued, the emperor's armies could easily have

launched an invasion of Swedish territory. The Swedes pre-empted this invasion and went to war before the Austrians, but the action was nevertheless primarily of a defensive nature.

During our own century this mode of explanation has been by far the most common one – often regarded as ‘the final truth’ about the war – yet it is striking how recent it in fact is. It was only around the year 1870 that the Prussian scholar Gustaf Droysen began stressing military factors while simultaneously rejecting all explanations based on the force of religion or ideas.<sup>11</sup> In Droysen’s opinion, the conflict between Sweden and Austria concerned the military hegemony over the Baltic sea and nothing else. In Droysen’s footsteps we find a large number of subsequent writers. As one of them, Curt Weibull, explains:

In the last years of the 1620s, political development in northern Europe had entered a decisive phase. Habsburg’s and Wallenstein’s plans were near completion. Denmark was beaten. The position of power which Sweden had won during the first years of the century was at stake. The Emperor and [the Polish king] Sigismund could be expected to join in a common attack.<sup>12</sup>

As another of them, Michael Roberts, concurs:

The motives which prompted the invasion of Germany are not in doubt. Gustav Adolf sought the security of his country; and that could be achieved only if the Imperial forces were evicted from the Baltic shore, and the nascent Habsburg naval base at Wismar wrested from their hands.<sup>13</sup>

Closely related to this mode of explanation we find explanations which regard the intervention as undertaken in an attempt to restore the European balance of power (explanation 6). This is an explanation common in general overviews of European political or military history where early-seventeenth-century Sweden is typically seen as a pawn in the century-long power game played between France and Austria.<sup>14</sup> Some historians have also focused on the personal fate of king Gustav Adolf and his family in the event of a Catholic victory in the German war (explanation 7). As they point out, the future of the Swedish royal house was closely tied to the future of the Protestant religion, and hence a threat to his religion would automatically have been interpreted as a personal threat to the king.<sup>15</sup>

It is also possible, however, to focus on military factors behind the war but to cast them in a very different light. The intervention was a war of conquest, it can be claimed, not a war of defence; the alleged military threats were mere pretexts for a policy of overseas expansion (explanation 9). Historians who have taken this line of reasoning have often attached importance to the personal ambitions of the king: Gustav Adolf wanted to become emperor of the Holy Roman Empire or at least the leader of his



own, northern German or Baltic, version of it. Recognising this as the driving force behind the war, Carl von Clausewitz wrote appreciatively of the military genius of the Swedish king; recognising the same cause, but casting it in a very negative light, we find a number of contemporary, more pacifistically inclined, authors.<sup>16</sup>

In the last set of explanations we find fourteen writers who stress economic or socio-economic factors behind the intervention. Sweden went to war in order to gain economic benefits, the most common of these arguments goes. What they wanted was control over the taxation on the river mouths in northern Germany and export markets for Swedish products such as copper.<sup>17</sup> When viewed in light of economic factors, as Franz Mehring argued, the war is readily explained:

To wage a thirty-year war for the sake of the differences of religion, to trample underfoot prosperous countries, to slaughter millions and millions of people, this appears to be possible only in a madhouse. Behind these differences, however, stood the economic contradictions in Europe of that time.<sup>18</sup>

Or according to the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch:

the Swedish king planned to develop a major market in Germany to buy Swedish ores by forcing the German states to convert their currencies from silver to copper. Another plan . . . aimed at merging the economy of the Swedish-controlled German territories with that of Sweden. In addition, the occupied German states served as a welcome and profitable source of revenues and were burdened with heavy taxes and tariffs.<sup>19</sup>

Easily added to this explanation is a focus on the economic interests of the Swedish aristocracy (explanation 11). The aristocrats used the king and the war as instruments to further their own ends, it has been argued, and religious or military motives were mere pretexts for a class war carried to foreign lands.<sup>20</sup> Overseas military expansion had been the official policy of the country for well over a hundred years, as Axel Strindberg noted, and the reasons behind it were of a commercial and social nature: it was a continuation of the policy of plunder which had started with Sweden's attack on Estonia in the 1560s.<sup>21</sup>

One of Oredsson's groups, fifteen authors altogether, does not readily fit into any one of the three camps we have discussed: those writers who simply reiterate the causes given in the *Manifesto* which the Swedish general headquarters published upon arrival in Germany (explanation 1). In this propaganda leaflet, the Swedes presented a long and meandering list of crimes and misdemeanours committed against them: the emperor and his men had intercepted Swedish couriers when travelling in Germany; they had given military support to the Polish king and encouraged him not to



make peace with Sweden; they had interfered with Swedish military recruitment in Germany; disrupted Swedish shipping; started creating a Baltic fleet and showed disrespect to Swedish ambassadors.<sup>22</sup> Historians who give prominence to these factors include names primarily from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: von Chemnitz, Samuel von Pufendorf, Voltaire and Schiller.<sup>23</sup>

### Historical writing and rewriting

A menu which contains too many unfamiliar dishes will inevitably be difficult to choose from. Which among the many explanations is the true one, or, at least, which explanation is better than which other? As I pointed out above, there is ultimately only one way in which to answer this question: the explanations must be related to empirical facts; they must 'account for', 'make sense of', or somehow 'fit', a historical record. Yet while this kind of 'testing' is a standard scientific procedure and relatively simple to carry out in the setting of a laboratory, it is far less clear what the same procedure requires when performed on historical material. There is a puzzle here which at first may sound like a play on words, but which turns out to involve a substantial problem: if 'the past' can be defined as 'that which no longer exists', how can it be studied? How can that be studied which *by definition* no longer exists? And how are we to arbitrate between different explanations if we are forced to judge them in terms of the non-existing?

A first step towards a solution to this puzzle is taken once we realise that we are talking about 'history' in two different senses here and that there is a highly problematic relationship between the two. On the one hand we have history as 'those events which once upon a time actually happened'; on the other hand we have history as '*our accounts* of these actual, once-upon-a-time-happening, events'.<sup>24</sup> While we generally fail to make this distinction, there is clearly a difference: while the actual events of the past are irrevocably gone, our accounts of that past are still around. In fact, it is through our accounts that the actual events of the past are *brought back* into the present and into existence; the past does not exist unless we *make it* exist. Yet this process of creation is also what makes the relationship between the two senses of 'history' so problematic. If the past is indeed created rather than simply 'there', then it will never be entirely clear what our accounts of the past in fact refer to or how they are to be evaluated or improved.

In order to learn more about the 'historical record' and what it might mean to 'test' an explanation in terms of it, let us begin by investigating a peculiar feature of the historiographical menu we reviewed. As we saw, the

composition of this menu varies greatly over time; there is a certain overlap between different periods to be sure, but there are also a number of radical shifts of emphasis. While the first historians who wrote on the intervention stressed the factors mentioned in the Swedish *War Manifesto*, writers at the end of the eighteenth century highlighted idealistic and religious factors, post-1870 writers military factors, and historians at the turn of the twentieth century economic factors. If it is true, as we like to believe, that the past is fully determined – that the ‘has been’ is something which *has been* – it seems we should be able to come up with a final explanation of it. Yet the history of the Swedish intervention is not only written, but also continuously *re-written*.<sup>25</sup> Why is this? Or put somewhat differently: what is the ontological status of the history which actually, once upon a time, happened, and the epistemological status of the history which is our accounts of these events, *and* what is the relation which holds between these two histories? There are at least three kinds of answers to these questions.

According to a first answer – we could call it ‘objectivism’ – history must continuously be rewritten since new source material is continuously being discovered and since new research methodologies are developed which allow us to come up with more objective and more complete accounts. This means that recent explanations will be better than older ones either because the discovery of new diaries, letters or protocols allow us to reject old explanations, or because new scientific methods make it possible to restate our old explanations with new, more solidly justified, self-confidence. Over time misconceptions and prejudice are gradually removed and one piece of objective knowledge is added to another. Hence the writing of history progresses steadily towards *the truth*.<sup>26</sup>

Although this objectivist answer may be the most common explanation for the perpetual rewriting of history, it is clearly insufficient as it stands. The reason is that it does not draw a clear enough distinction between facts, on the one hand, and interpretations, on the other. Objectivism fails since it does not address, or even recognise, the difference between the two senses of ‘history’. History as ‘that which actually happened’ and as ‘our account of these events’ are simply assumed to be the same, or rather, we are assured that the two *would be* the same if only the primary sources were good and numerous enough.<sup>27</sup> Objectivism, in other words, suffers from what Karl Popper criticised as the ‘fallacy of inductivism’: the notion that mere aggregations of facts can provide their own explanations.<sup>28</sup> But as Popper stressed, a better explanation is never produced by more facts alone – what we need instead is a new theory, model or a new mode of interpretation. With more facts we do not have better explanations, only bigger piles of old papers.

What more facts can do, however, is to provide us with more cases on which to test the explanations which we *already* possess; data can help us falsify accepted theories and adjudicate between conflicting accounts. Yet, as we pointed out, the past is a very different setting from the scientific laboratory: conclusive 'tests' are often difficult to arrange and it is often impossible to say what information would decisively undermine a certain explanation. This means that a certain interpretation can, at best, be made 'plausible'. For a historian to make something plausible means first of all to convince him- or herself that a given interpretation fits the facts, and secondly to convince his or her students or readers of the same. This raises a problem which a 'perspectivist' explanation of the rewriting of history exploits to the hilt: what if the cultural and geographical distance between the original event and the community of historians and their readers is so large that nothing can bridge it? What if what convinces us today is something very different from what convinced people at the time of the event we want to explain, and what if we are convinced by something very different again tomorrow?<sup>29</sup>

As an illustration of this point consider the fact that many of the accounts we reviewed above not only seemed to describe the Swedish intervention, but also the times in which the accounts themselves were written. Schiller and Burke, for example, obviously explained the Swedish action in light of that great cataclysmic event which had taken place in their own lifetimes: the French Revolution.<sup>30</sup> In their opinion it was the abstract, ideational, character of the Revolution which made it so extraordinary, and when they looked around for historical precedents for it they found the Thirty Years War. The Thirty Years War became the first occasion on which men allowed abstractions and universal principles to govern their actions; the Thirty Years War was explained in light of the French Revolution, and the French Revolution could hence be understood as a second instance of a more general pattern.<sup>31</sup> To a perspectivist, it is not difficult to see similar mechanisms at work also in our present-day explanations of the Swedish intervention. To us the realm of means and ends and measurable effectiveness occupies a position of unquestioned relevance and explanatory validity, and consequently it is not surprising that we explain the past in terms of the maximisation of political and military power or economic gain. The past is explained, but so is the present, and both moments in time serve to affirm the truth of our particular perspective.

If the perspectivist is correct, our accounts of the past will typically be rewritten with every change in intellectual outlook. Consequently there can be no privileged accounts and the works of later historians are not necessarily more reliable than those of earlier ones. Hence it is hardly surprising

that debates between different historiographical 'schools' never seem to be conclusively settled. Put in terms of the relationship between the two senses of the word 'history', a perspectivist will affirm the permanence and stability of the past, while denying us perfect access to it. There is indeed such a thing as a given body of historical data, but this body can only be discovered with the help of explanatory schemes which we develop in the present and these schemes will necessarily reflect the time and place in which they were made.

Although a perspectivist answer certainly points to a valid process at work, it overestimates the degree to which historians engage in straightforward causal explanations. In fact, historians do not only explain by supplying causes for events, but also in the much looser sense of providing assessments and evaluations of the past. They pass judgements on corrupt rulers and political systems; they enlighten their readers regarding the nature of, say, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution or Bolshevik culture.<sup>32</sup> In short, they give meaning to, and make sense of, the past. The best way in which to make sense of something, we should remember, is to insert this something into the context of a narrative. In order to see the meaning of an action or an event we want to know what role it played in a certain story and what contribution it made to the unfolding of a certain plot.<sup>33</sup> The historian-as-meaning-maker is consequently always a historian-as-narrator, and as such he or she is engaged in a task quite different from that which the perspectivist identified. While the perspectivist took a causal schema valid in his or her own time and applied it to the causal relations of the past, the historian-as-narrator simply starts telling a story: first this happened, then this and then that. Explicit causal explanations are not needed since there is nothing to explain as long as the readers or listeners are able to follow the account. It is only on rather rare occasions when something strange or unusual happens that causal explanations must be explicitly resorted to and then they will always take the form of intrusions which break the narrative flow.<sup>34</sup>

If we understand the historian's task in this fashion, the past which he or she can bring into existence will depend on what stories he or she is able to tell. This means that our account will be rewritten not only as a result of what happened before a certain historical event, but also depending on what happened *subsequently to it*. This must be so since the perpetual unfolding of time constantly provides us with different possible ends to our narratives. To the degree that we do alter the conclusion of our story, the plot which leads up to it must be rewritten and all the roles attributed to the events which it contains must be changed. If this seems mysterious, we should remember that we all engage in precisely the same enterprise whenever

evaluating events in our own personal biographies. Historical accounts change much in the same way as our accounts of, say, an early love affair may change as we grow increasingly older and wiser. In both cases, events which lay waiting, invisible, in the semi-obscurity of the past suddenly appear in new light, and other events – long fully explicated – reappear in the form of enigmas.<sup>35</sup>

This way of conceiving of the historian's task places history on a very different ontological footing. The past is no longer fixed and no longer stable, but instead at the mercy of the stories historians tell. The events of the past are nothing in themselves and only something when inserted into the context of a narrative; they are nothing but precursors awaiting future subsequents, just as the stories we tell about them are only temporary statements awaiting future revisions. History as that which 'actually happened' is nothing apart from history as 'our accounts' of these events. We cannot say anything at all about the past as it existed, since it can only come to exist through our narrative assessment of it.<sup>36</sup>

Let us briefly summarise this discussion and reach our first preliminary conclusions. As we said, historians engage in many different kinds of investigations and explain things in many different ways. One thing they do is to give causal explanations of the past, another thing they do is to evaluate past events in terms of narrative contexts, and as we saw, each task gives rise to its own reason for the rewriting of history. Yet the two tasks differ crucially in the ontological status which they accord to the past. When explaining something causally, the *historical* quality of this something is suspended. It no longer matters that a certain event happened in, say, 1630 and that it was preceded by events happening in 1629 and followed by whatever happened in 1631. When an event is treated causally the 'pastness' of the past no longer matters and there is no fundamental difference between an explanation of a past and an explanation of a present event. As a result, historians, as described by the perspectivists, could just as well be social scientists who simply happen to be working on historical material.

In comparison, historians, as described by the narrativists, are employing a methodology which is exclusively their own, and the past which the historians-as-story-tellers create has a unique ontological status. Here the past is no longer a continuous replacement of one present by another, but instead the inter-temporal *relationship* of presents. It is the one moment *replacing* the other which constitutes the past, and each moment is given historical significance only as a unit in a series. It is this relationship which a story, but never a causal schema, can grasp.<sup>37</sup>

Regardless of how we explain it, however, the very fact that our accounts



of the past constantly undergo revisions should give us pause. Anyone who sets out to explain something must necessarily aim to produce an explanation which is as 'objective' or 'true' as possible. Yet if we know that our account will one day be revised and superseded by others, our claim to objectivity and truth appears to be seriously undermined. This is the paradox of relativism: it seems impossible to make a strong case for what we take as true if we simultaneously accept that our interpretation is only one among many and that there is no way of conclusively arbitrating between different interpretations. The only solution here is perhaps to take a more casual view of the problem. We are all children of our time, we could perhaps argue, and it makes no sense to look for the kind of knowledge which exists outside of the boundaries set by time and place. Perhaps we just need to be more self-confident: if earlier generations of scholars could stand up for their own parochial explanations, so can we. Yet once the relativist lesson has sunk in, such confidence in ourselves can only be gained in bad faith, as it were. We can of course try to be self-confident, but there is a world of a difference between *having* confidence in oneself and *trying to have* confidence in oneself.

### **Social science explanations**

The obvious alternative left to us at this juncture is to abandon history and to look for a more scientific way of analysing questions of war and peace. If only it were possible to come up with a scientific theory of war initiation, no more rewritings would ever be necessary. Just as the laws which govern the natural universe never change, the laws of society – if only they existed – would be written in stone. During the last thirty-odd years a large number of such theories have been presented, but the vast majority of them fall into one or the other of two broad categories. According to contemporary social scientists, the initiation of war should be explained either: 1) as a result of the 'logic of the situation' confronting the decision-makers at the time of the decision to go to war; or 2) as a result of the operations of individual or collective 'decision-making mechanisms'.

Consider first theories of situational logic. Here, war is explained with the help of a simple syllogism: first a 'situation' is described in terms of the values of some economic, technological, military or other material variable; next, this situation is shown to have a 'logic' which compels the decision-maker to act in a certain way; and last, the action – the initiation of war – is explained as the result of this logic. While there are a number of explanations which operate in this manner, I will review only three of the more influential ones: theories introduced by Nazli Choucri and Robert

North, Robert Gilpin and Charles Doran.<sup>38</sup> Although none of them purport to explain all wars, they do claim to explain *major* wars conducted between *major* powers, and they all mention the Thirty Years War as one of their examples.

In the 'lateral pressure model' introduced by Nazli Choucri and Robert North, the focus is on economic, technological and demographic factors.<sup>39</sup> Human history, the authors tell us, can be described as a long process of interdependent growth in supply of and demand for primary products and other objects of consumption. Demand has historically been conditioned by growth in population and technology and by access to resources: the more people there are and the higher their technological level and their level of resource consumption, the more resources they have required.<sup>40</sup> The increase in demand can be met with the help of either domestic or foreign resources. If domestic resources for some reason are unavailable, demand cannot be met at home, and as a result the country is forced to look for resources outside of its territorial boundaries.<sup>41</sup> When two or more major powers extend their respective interests in this fashion, 'there is a strong probability that these interests will be opposing, and the activities of these nations may collide'.<sup>42</sup> The outcome is often war.

In his 'theory of hegemonic wars', Robert Gilpin makes a distinction which reminds us strongly of the base/superstructure distinction in Marxist thought. There are, Gilpin says, economic and technological processes and preferences, on the one hand, and policy instruments and policy output, on the other.<sup>43</sup> The power of a state and the instrumentalities of statecraft all depend – at least 'in the last instance', we would presume – on economic and technological factors. An important superstructural phenomenon is the international 'hierarchy of prestige' which ranks nations into categories as major, medium or minor powers. The leading nation, or group of nations, Gilpin calls a 'hegemon'. The hegemon is the country which sets the rules and makes the basic decisions in the international system, but also the country which supplies public goods to countries who cannot provide them for themselves. The prestige the hegemon derives from these activities serves to solidify and to strengthen its influence.<sup>44</sup> Over time, however, the hegemon's power-base will erode as tensions develop between the determinants of power and its instrumentalities. As Gilpin argues, economic and technological shifts – as well as the 'exploitation' of the one big power by the many small – will gradually make the hegemon relatively weaker and lesser powers correspondingly stronger.<sup>45</sup> This in turn has repercussions for the balance of power and war is a likely outcome since those actors who would benefit most from a change in the rules governing the system – and those who now have gained the power to bring about such changes – will



try to alter the system in ways that favour their interests.<sup>46</sup> In the 'hegemonic war' which follows, the stakes are enormous and the means employed unlimited. Once this war is over, however, the system returns to an equilibrium, with a new hegemon and a new international order reflecting a new distribution of power and the interests of its new dominant members.<sup>47</sup>

In Charles Doran's 'power cycle theory' also it is changes in the underlying determinants of power – in economic and technological processes – that are the decisive factors. Because of the waxing and waning of these variables, major powers go through cycles of ascendancy, maturation and decline. Yet Doran sees no necessary one-to-one relationship between these fundamental changes and the actual foreign policy which a country pursues since political decisions may have an impact on economic and technological development and consequently also on a nation's position on the power cycle. War, that is, is not brought about by material situations *per se*, but rather by the way in which political decision-makers *react to* changes in these situations. Here four points on the power cycle are critical: the two turning-points – the zenith and the nadir of the cycle – and the two inflection points – where the power of nation *A* suddenly supersedes, or falls below, that of nation *B*. As Doran tells us, these points 'signal a new trajectory for state power that was not previously experienced or observed'.<sup>48</sup> In this context the concept of 'role' becomes important: each position on the power cycle is associated with a given pattern of foreign policy behaviour, and war is the result of sudden changes in such roles. Major wars are reactions to 'traumatic changes in the nation's relative power and associated role and security perceptions, and massive, system-wide war is a historical, but not necessary, accompaniment of systems transformation'.<sup>49</sup>

Turning their attention to the Thirty Years War, all authors find their theories corroborated. The period leading up to the war, according to Choucri and North, was characterised by 'new military technologies, new organisational techniques, and modes of discipline – plus the availability of funds to hire mercenaries'. This provided a 'succession of European kings with an ability to concentrate their domestic capabilities, encourage trade according to the emerging tenets of mercantilism, and expand their territories, activities, interests, and power over much of the globe'.<sup>50</sup> Although Sweden is not explicitly mentioned, the theory would lead us to believe that increasing demands – impossible to satisfy domestically – were a fundamental cause behind the intervention. An increased stake in overseas trade together with domestic economic growth led to a demand for foreign markets which in turn led to war. In Gilpin's view, the issue at stake in the seventeenth-century conflict was whether Europe was to be dominated by the imperial power of the Habsburgs or become a system of autonomous

nation-states. The economic conflict underlying this rivalry was one between feudalism and commercial capitalism although the confrontation was couched in the religious language of Protestantism and Catholicism typical of the period.<sup>51</sup> While Gilpin also does not mention Sweden explicitly, we can guess that he would explain the intervention in terms of how an upwardly mobile, and economically and technically progressive, nation sought to challenge the position of a backward-looking, economically stagnant, hegemon. Doran, finally, pinpoints the transformations in foreign policy roles that characterised the early seventeenth century: 'arguing that "God has forsaken" them', the Austrians suddenly became 'paranoid and belligerent at the same time'. Simultaneously, Sweden and Holland who had 'enjoyed a meteoric rise, abruptly demanded a larger role'. Together 'this massive transformation of structure and roles in the international system resulted in the Thirty Years' War'.<sup>52</sup>

Next let us turn to social science theories that focus on decision-making processes. Here a decision to go to war is explained by the workings of the mechanisms through which the decision to go to war was reached. Here 'rationality' – the notion that individuals and groups act in order to maximise their benefits and minimise their losses – is taken to be the key concept. Yet, as we are about to see, there is little agreement among the authors concerned regarding the extent to which people are in fact able to live up to the rationalistic ideals.<sup>53</sup>

According to Bruce Bueno de Mesquita's 'expected-utility theory', a decision to go to war is always the result of an attempt to maximise the utility of a country or the utility of a country's leading statesman.<sup>54</sup> Faced with a given situation, Bueno de Mesquita tells us, the statesman goes through a calculus where the arguments for an armed action are weighed against the arguments against; the utility to be won compared with the utility to be lost. The statesman takes into consideration, for example, the relative strength of his or her own country relative to that of the potential defender; the value which he or she places on changing the defender's policies relative to the possible changes in policies that the country may be forced to accept if it loses; the relative strengths and interests of all other states that possibly may intervene into the conflict.<sup>55</sup> If, on balance, utility is to be gained, the choice is clear: 'the broadest – and seemingly obvious – generalisation that emerges from the theory is the expectation that wars (or other conflicts) will be initiated only when the initiator believes the war will yield positive expected utility'.<sup>56</sup>

John Steinbruner, among many theorists, has questioned the applicability of rationalistic assumptions such as Bueno de Mesquita's.<sup>57</sup> The ratio-

nal actor model is not wrong or invalid, he says, but it cannot handle 'complex situations', that is, situations that involve trade-offs between different values, uncertainty and risk, or situations in which the power to make decisions is dispersed over many independent individuals and groups. According to Steinbruner, most issues of government policy are complex in this sense and under these circumstances a 'cybernetic model' of the decision-making process is more applicable. The cybernetic statesman never makes calculations regarding the potential outcomes of all possible alternatives; instead he or she aims to reduce the complexity of the situation by monitoring the feedback from a few critical variables. The statesman simply settles on a course of action and waits until the results – the 'feed-back' – of that action come in. Foreign policy, that is, is never rationally planned, but always decided upon in accordance with some standard operational procedures. Only if the divergence between the policy goal and the outcome is sufficiently large – if it gets 'too hot' or 'too cold' – does the statesman change direction.<sup>58</sup> War, consequently, is best understood as the outcome of the (mis-)application of these time-honoured rules of thumb.

In a similar model, Graham Allison sees foreign policy as the collective result of the multitude of bargains struck at different levels in the bureaucratic machinery of a state.<sup>59</sup> Governmental action, he says, does not presuppose governmental intention: actual policy is only rarely consciously intended by any particular individual or group, and, more commonly, separate individuals with *different* intentions contribute their own little piece to an aggregate outcome.<sup>60</sup> Since this is the case, a foreign policy action such as a decision to go to war can never be explained as a rational, utility maximising, action on the part of a state. Instead the task of the analyst should be that of 'displaying the game – the action-channel, the positions, the players, their preferences, and the pulling and hauling – that yielded, as a resultant, the action in question'.<sup>61</sup> Under conditions of bureaucratic politics, in other words, war may be an aggregate result that none of the participants in fact wanted.

The work of Robert Jervis provides an important complement to these approaches by analysing how decisions are made in the minds of statesmen and politicians responsible for taking countries to war. As Jervis makes clear, it is quite impossible for the human mind to process data in a fully rational manner since a number of psychological mechanisms regarding perception, cognition and memory constantly intervene and distort our vision. For example: the beliefs that people hold tend rather toward consistency and balance than toward full information; those pieces of information are more readily believed which fit into already existing cognitive patterns; we more readily see what we are expecting to see, and desires and

fears often influence our perception of the world.<sup>62</sup> As a result of processes like these, foreign policy decision-makers often act on a flawed vision of the world, and, as Jervis makes clear, flawed visions of the world will result in policy mistakes, perhaps wars.

Although none of this group of theorists explicitly discusses the Swedish intervention, it is easy enough to guess what they would say about it. The Swedish action can readily be fashioned – *à la* Bueno de Mesquita – as a rational enterprise. In fact, explicit calculations of costs and benefits appear to have been common among the Swedish decision-makers during the years which preceded the intervention. As the records of the discussions held in the Council of the Realm testify, the Swedes regarded the emperor's army as a threat, but not as impossible to beat; the princes in Germany were reluctant to side with the Swedes, but not impossible to convince with the help of force; and the war could be expected to pay for itself if only carried out on foreign soil. With the help of Steinbruner's model we could similarly make a case for 'expansionism' as a standard operational procedure of Swedish foreign policy from the 1560s onward. To engage in expansionistic military actions to the east and the south of the country had been a knee-jerk solution to many different political ills, and in 1630 it was applied once again. And although Allison's model may seem difficult to apply to a country such as early-seventeenth-century Sweden which had a very rudimentary bureaucratic structure, it is perhaps not impossible to argue that there were other domestic actors – chancellor Oxenstierna, perhaps, or the Council of the Realm or the Diet – who interfered with the decision-making process. Obviously several of the psychological mechanisms which Jervis described also appear to have been at play in the Swedish decision: perhaps the decision to intervene was conditioned by the demonic view that the Swedish leaders had of their enemies, or perhaps it was a consequence of their highly inflated and unrealistic sense of their own role and mission in the world.

### Science vs. meaning

Once again we are confronted with a number of different explanations which we must find a way to adjudicate between, and just as for the historical explanations we discussed above there is ultimately only one way in which to do this: social science explanations must be tested against empirical data. Yet, and again just as in the case of historical explanations, there are many *pre-empirical* questions to be asked before we can proceed to this testing stage. It cannot satisfy us to know merely *that* a certain theory explains a certain thing since we also want to know *how* it explains what it

explains. We need to know which causal variables go with which others; why certain factors are brought in and not others; and under what circumstances certain assumptions can be expected to hold.

The most important such pre-empirical question concerns the role of meaning and intentionality in social affairs. As we saw, the two modes of scientific theorising are sharply divided over this issue: while theories of situational logic disregard intentionality and focus instead on the causal impact of material factors, theories of decision-making processes concentrate explicitly on the processes through which decisions are made. How we adjudicate between these two forms of theorising will accordingly come to depend on what role we ascribe to material factors and to decision-making processes, respectively.

Let us once again begin with the theories of situational logic. A first question to ask here is how the factors emphasised by these theories can be said to *cause* war. At first blush this connection may seem hopelessly obscure: wars are actions, things that people *do*, but inanimate matter, in and by itself, surely cannot be said to act. Wars are undertaken by human beings, not by economic, technological or demographic factors. In order for these theories to explain anything they must consequently presuppose a connection between material situations and political outcomes which is forged as the result of the actions of human beings. The situation causes individuals to act, the argument must be, and this action in turn results in war.

Yet even if specified in this fashion, the exact nature of the connection between situation and outcome remains murky. The distance is somehow too great between, say, an increase in a country's gross national product or a decrease in its mortality rate and the same country's decision to attack its neighbour. There are simply too many causes and effects involved, and if we tried to spell them all out we would soon find that some of the links in the causal chains were uncertain, others inherently ambiguous and much of the information we need simply unavailable. The theories, we could say, provide no micro foundations for the macro phenomena they seek to explain; the explanations are never disaggregated into preferences, choices and actions attributed to named – or even nameable – individuals.

This, however, is where the theorists we reviewed make a crucial move. Instead of entering into a detailed discussion of different micro mechanisms, they simply hold on to the two *tail ends* of the causal chains: initial conditions (economic, technological and demographic processes) in one hand and outcomes (major power wars) in the other. The hope is that if only the connection between these two sets of variables is convincing enough – if only the 'conduction' of the chain is high enough to minimise



the loss of explanatory power on the way – the scientific enterprise may be successfully completed.

Yet, and as these theorists are at pains to point out, this connection is *theoretically deduced* and thus more than just an empty statistical correlation. More precisely: what connects material attributes to the initiation of war are stipulations regarding human motivations which are asked to substitute for the many causal connections that the theories were unwilling, or unable, to specify. In Choucri and North's lateral pressure model, demand arising from 'basic needs' fills this function; in Gilpin's hegemonic war model, individuals necessarily act in order to equalise economic and military power between states; and according to Doran's power cycle model, the foreign policy role a statesman assumes depends on the state's position on the power cycle. According to all three theories, in short, wars are initiated as individuals react in a uniform, or at least predictable, manner to options made available or precluded by the technological, economic or demographic circumstances they are facing.

This way of explaining social events corresponds closely to what Karl Popper talked about as explanation by reference to 'the situation in which the agent found himself', or 'situational analysis'.<sup>63</sup> Advocating this mode of explanation as a multipurpose tool for history and the social sciences, Popper approvingly refers us to Leo Tolstoy's attempt in *War and Peace* to show 'the small influence of the actions and decisions of Napoleon, Alexander, Kutuzov, and the other great leaders of 1812, in the face of what may be called the logic of events'.<sup>64</sup> Or, to invoke a similar terminology introduced by Spiro Latsis, we could say that the situation which the statesmen faced were 'single-exit situations': 'situations where the actor's choice is uniquely determined by situational considerations'.<sup>65</sup> As an example of such a situation consider a house with only one door where a fire suddenly breaks out.<sup>66</sup> On the basis of this information alone we may predict with very high certainty what people trapped inside the house will do. We need little or no knowledge of individual intentions, motivations or psychological traits. The description contains its own prediction, as it were, and when we observe a person behaving in the way we predicted, we can say that we have explained the action. We can safely assume that people run for the one door available in order to save their lives.

As should be obvious, however, the economic and technological processes pointed to by the three theories fall far short of describing situations of a single-exit type. War is hardly ever an inevitable consequence of the processes described.<sup>67</sup> In fact, we could plausibly argue that society is generally characterised not by single, but by *multiple*, exits. Few social situations ever give rise to imperatives that force everybody to act in the same uniform



manner. If  $k$  happens, rational human beings may very well disagree as to whether to do  $x$  or  $y$  or perhaps even  $z$ . This creates problems for any explanation which relies on a situational logic since preferences can no longer simply be 'read off' a material description of the world.<sup>68</sup> If there are many exits out of a given situation, the independent variable pinpointed by the theory will be reduced to one of many – perhaps very many – necessary, but not sufficient, background conditions. Necessary but not sufficient background conditions cannot of course be treated as causes of events.<sup>69</sup>

Yet a critique must cut deeper. The fundamental problem with theories of situational logic is not primarily that the situations they describe are far less constraining than the theory presupposes, but rather that the entire causal relationship between material factors and human actions is misconstrued. We do not, as these theories imply, live in a material world which 'presents' us with various more or less constraining options; instead we live in a material world which we *interpret*, and it is on the basis of these interpretations that we present various options *to ourselves*. Hence it follows that a mere description of material factors will never tell us much about what actions a person will undertake. What an outside observer should study are not material factors, but instead the interpretations *given to* material factors; the way in which human beings make sense of their world. Once the outside observer embarks upon this alternative task, however, he or she will soon find that the way in which situations are interpreted depends crucially on what we have been taught to see, to feel and to expect; it depends on how we are conditioned by our culture. Hence a study of action must always be undertaken as a study of the cultural resources through which people give meaning to the material worlds in which they live. Matter simply does not matter, except in the form in which it is apprehended by culture and acknowledged by individual members of that culture.

If this argument is accepted, we must also accept that situational imperatives must always be redescribed in terms of cultural imperatives and that our explanations can rely not on the attributes of material situations *per se*, but instead on the assumptions we allow ourselves to make regarding the beliefs and intentions of people who face these situations. This, we should note, is true also of people trapped inside burning houses or faced with other similar, highly constraining, situations. What we do when we explain the action of the person trapped is to rank the options available to her – and of course we have no difficulty understanding her wish to save her life – but it is the way we imagine the person interpreting the situation that determines how we rank her preferences, not something inherent in flammable physical matter.<sup>70</sup> Yet once this step has been taken it is easy to

introduce complications which will make even single-exit situations inherently unpredictable. How will a woman trapped on the bottom floor react if she has a boyfriend or a sickly grandmother on the top floor? What if she is suicidal? Or what if she decides that the conflagration is but a fiction produced by a hallucinogenic drug she administered to herself that particular morning?

If this is true for one-doored, burning, houses, it is all the more true for the situations that Choucri and North, Gilpin, and Doran described, and we must consequently conclude that the connections they stipulate between situations and outcomes fail to carry the explanatory weights placed upon them. We may certainly agree with Choucri and North that there is a small number of 'basic needs' pertaining equally to everybody, but once this list is expanded beyond food, drink, shelter and sex, there will be immediate disagreement. There is no sense in which military expansion can be said to arise out of a 'basic human need' unless needs are defined so as to refer to nothing more than someone's particular preferences (as in 'I *really* need a new Porsche'). Similarly, we may perhaps agree with Gilpin that the increase in power of one nation may result in instability, perhaps war, but we must at the same time insist that threats are products of human interpretations, not of the increase in economic or technological variables. Economic growth and technological developments are features of a material world, but threats only exist in the minds of men. Alone among the theorists, Doran comes close to granting this point in his discussion of how 'roles' determine foreign policy, but he fumbles it by ultimately concluding that roles can be deduced from a nation's position on the power cycle. A power cycle may perhaps be important, we should conclude; such cycles should not however be analysed as natural facts, but instead always as cultural *arte-facts*.

If we are disappointed by theories cast in terms of situational logic, theories of decision-making processes immediately strike us as a vast improvement. Here, finally, we find, if not named, at least nameable, human beings who act and react on the basis of the options which their interpretations of the world make available to them. Not surprisingly, our critique of theories of situational logic receives strong support from this group of scholars. As they all stress, the way people make sense of their worlds, and the way they make decisions, really do make a difference to political outcomes.<sup>71</sup> Yet these scholars too are scientists, not historians, and it is not this, that or the other historical event which interests them, but instead the *trans*-historical and general features of the social world. Just like the theorists of situational logic, their aim is to come up with cross-cultural, causal, generalisations

which may be theoretically explained. Thus, while their theories do indeed concern the people who make decisions, they have surprisingly little to say regarding matters of actual empirical substance. The focus is always on the 'hardware' of the decision-making process, as it were, not on matters of 'software': it is not what people think about their worlds – how they give it meaning – which concerns them, but instead how they go about making decisions.<sup>72</sup> It is the fact *that* people have interests and that they act in terms of them that is crucial, not what any particular interests *are*.

Although this may sound like a peculiar way of explaining events, it may – given the scientific aims of this group of scholars – be the only way they can proceed. While few general theoretical conclusions can be drawn regarding matters of actual historical substance, the *procedural* features of the decision-making process do no doubt lend themselves to generalisations. No matter which historical case we study, we find individuals and groups who seek to gain benefits and avoid losses; people, that is, who act in order to further their interests. And while the different authors differ profoundly regarding the extent to which individuals and groups in fact manage to live up to the rationalistic ideal, they all agree that rationalism provides the base-line from which any deviations are to be measured. Theory, on this account, explains what happens to pre-existing, exogenously given, preferences as they are processed by the decision-making mechanism of organisations or individual human beings.

A theory which turns an interest into an empty and exogenous variable will inevitably, however, have problems explaining concrete historical events. All that the theory can tell us in the end is that human beings seek to maximise their utility, or that there are problems with this procedure, but what this means in terms of *concrete actions* must always be left unspecified. The theory presupposes the prior existence of a meaningful world, but it remains agnostic regarding how this world was created; we have the form of an explanation, but the form has no content. In neo-classical economic theory, which relies on a similar theoretical framework, the use of monetary rewards to measure utility provides a simple way to proceed at this juncture. In fact, in economic theory preferences are usually *not* treated as exogenous at all, but instead translated into one unit – money – which serves as a substitute for all the substantive goals the theory was unable to specify. Economic gain and nothing else is what moves an economic actor. In politics there are no doubt situations which can be treated in a similar fashion: in an election, for example, a party characteristically seeks to maximise its number of votes and few other concerns are of equal importance.<sup>73</sup> In fact international politics is also sometimes analysed in a similar way. As we saw above, security maximisation was the explicit aim of the

statesmen that Bueno de Mesquita described, and similar substantive goals served as points of departure for the other theorists we reviewed. When translated into a concrete foreign policy agenda such over-arching policy goals may, for example, result in higher military budgets, membership in military alliances or perhaps protectionistic economic policies.

Yet this last set of conclusions is clearly unwarranted. If these theorists are to remain agnostic regarding matters of historical and cultural substance, they cannot end up embracing one or another of some quite specific substantive policy goals. Based on the bare-bone logic of the theory we have no reason to suppose that a statesman will seek to increase the defence budget rather than, say, the budget devoted to development aid. If preferences are exogenously given, decision-making theory cannot distinguish between them since all that the model tells us is that people act – or fail fully to act – in terms of interests *however defined*. If decision-making theory wants to say something more than this, some additional, auxiliary, assumptions must be made. Such additional assumptions may be justified, or not, as the case may be, but in the context of our present discussion the point is that they must be justified on *some other grounds* than those which decision-making theory itself provides.

When compared with theories of situational logic, theories of decision-making mechanisms are indeed a vast improvement in that they deal not just with material situations, but also with how human beings make decisions when facing these situations. Yet decision-making theorists too have problems addressing questions of meaning and intentionality: all they can tell us is how a certain decision was reached, but not what the decision was or why it is better – more *meaningful* – than another. As a result, if our aim is to explain actual historical events, the theories give us very little guidance. Without some additional assumptions the decision-making devices have nothing to work on; the models will be elaborate in form but vacuous in terms of content. If we have a concrete empirical question to answer this is clearly not good enough. What we want to know first of all is what the intentions of the decision-makers are and why they have these particular intentions rather than some others.

### Historical and scientific explanations

If we compare the work of historians with that of social scientists we may perhaps prefer the approach of the former after all. In many ways the traditional brand of social scientists seem to have set their goals too high: they have looked for cross-cultural, causal, generalisations which can be explained with the help of theories, but so far very few interesting

such generalisations have been discovered and the theories that purport to explain them are more often than not of a very truistic kind.<sup>74</sup> The scholars we reviewed focused on the features of the world which their intellectual tools allowed them to analyse, but there is *a priori* no reason why these particular, theorisable, features should be the most important ones.

In this chapter we discussed one primary reason why this quest for a science of war has been unsuccessful: the inability of scientific approaches to deal properly with questions of intentionality and meaning. While the natural world in and of itself contains no meanings, the social world emphatically does; there can be no such thing as a social world without meaning and a social science which presupposes such a world will never get very far.<sup>75</sup> This is the precise reason why I rejected the approach advocated by theories of situational logic, and also why I remain suspicious regarding theories of decision-making mechanisms. While the former group of scholars ignored the question of meaning, the latter group dealt with it on a purely formal and procedural level.

If this is the criterion by which explanations are to be judged, the work of historians will always fare much better – at least, that is, the work of those historians who have seen their task as that of telling stories about the past. Narrative, we said, is the principal way in which human beings make sense of the world: it is only by inserting a fact, an event or a person into the context of a narrative that we understand its import, its significance or its role. There are good reasons, in other words, why we turn to a historian rather than to a social scientist whenever we want to make sense of an action such as the Swedish intervention of 1630.

One question still remains, however. Even if historians are better at making sense of the past than social scientists, we have still not said anything whatsoever about the relationship which obtains between the meanings that historians make and the meanings made by the historical actors *themselves*.<sup>76</sup> If our aim is to explain actions, this connection is surely crucial: if we assume that human beings act on the basis of their interpretations of the world, we need access to these interpretations in order to explain what they do.

Yet, as a moment's reflection should make obvious, such access is not easily gained. Perhaps we could imagine asking the historical actors in question why they did what they did; or rather: we could gather the actors' statements regarding intentions or reconstruct such statements from the source material left to us.<sup>77</sup> There are, however, a number of familiar problems with this procedure, concerning the availability, reliability and



validity of our data. Often we simply lack the kinds of sources that would allow us to determine how a certain historical actor interpreted his or her world. By methodological conviction, historians have ranked primary sources according to what we might call a 'private-to-public continuum'. As the sources become increasingly private, it has been assumed, we move closer to 'true' statements, and conversely, as the sources become increasingly public, they become increasingly unreliable.<sup>78</sup> If our aim is to reconstruct actual intentions, intimate letters or diary entries are, according to this view, better than official speeches or declarations. And conversely, if all we have are official documents, no valid statements regarding intentions can safely be put together. Even in cases where our explanation can draw on sources from the private end of this spectrum, however, we may still mistrust the statements that historical actors provide. People are, after all, wont to lie and to misrepresent their intentions, and this is no doubt particularly true for people who engage in controversial enterprises like wars. If we want to avoid merely rehashing old war-mongering propaganda, we can never take what historical actors say at face value.<sup>79</sup>

This scepticism is likely to put a certain distance between the historian and the people he or she writes about. In fact, this distance is likely to be quite large, not only in cases where the appropriate source material is unavailable or when it cannot be trusted, but also – and much more fundamentally – because the historical actors in a sense are far too ignorant. Most of the time they simply do not know what they are doing. While actors, by virtue of their participation in an action, can never grasp the full import of what they are up to, historians, who see the same action in a broader temporal context, are far better placed to explain it.<sup>80</sup> There is, in short, a basic difference of perspectives: while an action, to an actor, is something to be brought about in the *future*, an action, to a historian, is something which happened in the *past*.<sup>81</sup> While the intentions of an actor are always *prospective* and forward-looking, the explanations given by the historian are always backward-looking and given *in retrospect*.<sup>82</sup> Since historians naturally insist on the primacy of their own accounts, the connection between them and the accounts given by the historical actors is much more tenuous than often assumed.

Even while historians thus characteristically prefer to rely on their own versions of the intentions which guided each actor, it is nevertheless the case that intentions feature prominently in their accounts. We should not be surprised that this is the case. The story which the historian-*qua*-narrator tells is necessarily *about* a something or a someone – the story has a 'subject', as it were – and it is the actions undertaken by this subject that propel the story forward. These actions, in turn, are characteristically



explained in intentional terms. In this way historical narratives become stories of what historical subjects do, and explanations take the form of the historians' rationalistic reconstructions of the interests which guided those actions. The manner in which historians have explained the Swedish intervention of 1630 is a good case in point. Despite wide disagreement regarding the substantive content of the explanation, the historians have nevertheless agreed on its *form*. As they all argue, the action should be explained by reference to the *interests* it was undertaken in order to further: it was the religious, military or economic interest of Sweden, its king or its leading classes, that brought the country to war. On this very general level, historians thus come to embrace the same explanatory framework as the social scientists. Both historical explanations and valid forms of scientific theory tell us that individuals, but also collective entities like states, do what they do because it is in their interest to do it.

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## The modern orthodoxy

If we turn away from the context of the Swedish intervention for a moment, we will find that the consensus which the previous chapter documented is only a special case of a more general consensus on how actions should be explained. Despite wide disagreements regarding almost all other issues, modern scholars tend to agree on the simple proposition that individual human beings, but also collective entities of various kinds, *act in their interests*. That is, they do what they do *because* it is in their interest to do it. Since this is the case, it seems an outside observer – a historian or a social scientist – would be justified in invoking those same interests in an explanation of why an individual or a group did a certain thing. On the basis of this reasoning historians have sought to come up with ‘rational reconstructions’ of the intentions of historical personae, economists have assumed the existence of ‘rational actors’, and social scientists have explained everything from voters’ behaviour to the propensity of workers to go on strike by the extent to which a certain action on balance provides more ‘utility gain’ than another. In fact, even radical critics such as Marxists or feminists have agreed that social classes, or gendered beings, act in terms of their ‘class interests’ or the interests of their sex.

The only point of contention here concerns the degree to which people are in fact able to live up to the rationalistic ideal. As we saw in our discussion of social science theories above, many scholars have argued that perfect rationality is never attainable in practice and that the maximisation of utility must often be replaced by more limited goals. Yet the issue at stake here is not the applicability of the rational standard as such, but instead how people should be judged by it. Less than perfectly rational actions are, after all, also assessed in rationalistic terms.

Perhaps we could call this the ‘modern orthodox’ way of explaining actions, or simply the ‘modern orthodoxy’. It is the modern *orthodoxy* since it is embraced by scholars of very different persuasions and temperaments

working in very different fields of research. It is the *modern* orthodoxy since it has an intellectual ancestry which reaches back no further than to the late seventeenth century. In the Middle Ages actions were not explained in this way, and in the future actions will, most probably, again be explained differently. This is *our* notion, the way in which *we* explain what happens in our societies.

This next-to-complete scholarly consensus should, however, make us suspicious. If almost everyone explains actions in almost the same way we must ask why this is the case. One possibility here is of course that the consensus is the result of a valid insight: that this is the real reason why people act as they do and that no other explanation is therefore possible. Another – more disturbing – possibility is that the scholarly consensus is a consequence of an oversight rather than an insight: that this way of explaining events has been taken as self-evidently true and has therefore never been questioned or properly investigated. In this chapter I will address this issue by asking what it in fact might mean to ‘act in one’s interests’. As we shall see this question can be broken down into three sub-questions. First of all we must define what ‘interests’ are and what they are not. We must distinguish interests from other factors that may have an impact on actions: desires and passions, social rules or perhaps the precepts of natural, or God-given, laws. Secondly, we must define who the ‘one’ – the ‘self’ or the ‘subject’ – is to whom interests are said to belong. What is a ‘person’, and in what sense can we talk of interests as things that this person ‘has’? Thirdly, we must establish a causal link between the interests we have and the actions we perform. Without such a causal connection, no interest-based explanation can ever be valid.

### Modern interests

A first thing which strikes us is how difficult the concept of interest has been to define in a conclusive, or even a reasonably clear, fashion. While all scholars assume that people have interests and that they act in terms of them, few have had something particularly enlightening to say regarding what they *are*. This does not mean, of course, that many definitional attempts have not been made, but as one definition has been added to another, the result has been increasing conceptual confusion rather than clarity. We have ended up with a number of competing definitions, but we have had no good way of choosing between them. The concept of interests is, as it were, ‘essentially contested’.<sup>1</sup>

In order to proceed here we would ideally need some form of a *meta-conceptual* standard by which the existing definitions could be assessed. We

would need a definition which captures the *most essential* essence of the concept concerned. Yet no such standard can ever be found. Not only is it difficult to say what such a standard would in fact measure, but it is equally impossible to provide it with a rationale which itself would not be as contested as the definitions it is supposed to assess. If this road is barred, we may instead try asking ourselves why it is that 'essentially contested concepts' are contested. One intriguing suggestion here is that the contest in question is a consequence of the very attempt to grasp the essential, to define what a concept 'really is'. If our view of what things 'really are' differs, then we should perhaps not be surprised that conflict will be the result. Yet if there are no such underlying 'essences' of concepts, then surely the definition of a concept cannot take the form of a search for them. We cannot say what interests 'really are' since what they really are is a question for us to decide.

If we think there might be some validity to this suspicion, a historical – or genealogical, if you prefer – investigation is a promising way to explore it. According to this methodology, our aim should not be to try to replace the existing definitions with one that is 'truer' than the others, but instead simply to ask ourselves how it happened that a particular concept came to be defined in one particular way rather than in another.<sup>2</sup> It is, in other words, the *contest* regarding the definition that should be our object of study, not its purported essence.

If we decide to analyse the concept of interest in this fashion the writings of Thomas Hobbes are the place to begin. When Hobbes turned to a discussion of human actions and their causes in the sixth chapter of *Leviathan* he began by stressing the role of passion.<sup>3</sup> Life is ceaseless motion, he argued, and the lives of men are characterised by the ceaseless movements of their desires. We are never, and can never be, fully satisfied; once we have attained one goal, we immediately see it as mere means towards some further goal.<sup>4</sup> The restlessness of desire results in a restless quest for power since it is only by gaining power over the world and over other men that we can get what we want.<sup>5</sup> Yet since one man's quest for power will inevitably encroach upon the similar quests which all others pursue, there will also always be conflict: men are, as it were, 'in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man'.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, as Hobbes pointed out, man is not only driven by a desire for power, but also by desires for other things. Man does indeed have a passion for riches, glory and dominion, but there are also 'passions that incline men to Peace', namely 'Feare of Death; Desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a Hope by their Industry to obtain them'.<sup>7</sup> There

are 'good' desires, we could say, as well as 'bad', and we can escape from the perpetual state of war only if we let the violent passions be harnessed by the peaceful ones.<sup>8</sup> The only requirement for this solution to be possible is that other men can be trusted, and this trust was precisely what the 'great LEVIATHAN' – that 'mortall God' – was supposed to provide: by subjecting themselves to a common power which would 'keep them all in awe', the wills of men would be reformed and peace at home assured as well as mutual aid against foreign enemies.<sup>9</sup>

At least two features of Hobbes' argument deserve emphasis in the context of our discussion. The first concerns the role he accorded to reason. To engage in a process of reasoning, according to Hobbes, is to carry out a calculation very similar to calculations carried out in mathematics. Reason thus understood had nothing whatsoever to do with reason defined as the medieval schoolmen had defined it: as a command given by Nature or by God. That man should subject himself to Leviathan was a requirement of reason written not in upper-, but in lower-case letters, as it were. This was not what God or Nature required man to do, but instead what he himself would do as he weighed the *pros* of the state of nature against the *cons*, and as he came to realise that Leviathan was the only acceptable alternative to it.<sup>10</sup>

The second feature we should stress concerns the very *form* of Hobbes' argument. As we have seen, he begins by setting up a number of premises from which he makes deductions, and by proceeding in this fashion, a reader who accepts the premises – and who believes the deduction to be carried out correctly – will also have to accept the conclusions which Hobbes reaches. Leviathan is thus not only what men *will* establish, but also what they *must* establish. The conclusion is at the same time both empirically and normatively necessary, and as such the normatively necessary can come to serve as a judge of the empirically existing. If reality does not conform to the theory, it is reality, not the theory, that should be changed.<sup>11</sup>

Although Hobbes himself never talked about 'interests' as such, a definition of the concept was easily extracted from his argument. As Albert Hirschman has pointed out, it was the 'good' passions which Hobbes had identified, together with the reasoning processes which allowed them into the act of deliberation, which later came to be equated with the interests of a state, a group or a person. In fact, during the short span of a few decades at the end of the seventeenth century this new concept came to attract an enormous amount of scholarly attention. According to Hirschman, the reason for this enthusiasm can be found in the new perspective which the concept seemed to offer on the perennial problem of how to bring order and peace to society. As political philosophers increasingly had come to

realise, the new type of social and political institution – the state – required a new form of political morality. A stable social order could not be established on the basis of human passions alone, nor, as the medieval schoolmen had argued, on the basis of the commands given by God or by Nature. While the passions of man were inherently capricious, unruly and destructive, the commands of God or Nature were often very difficult to follow. If men gave free reign to their passions they would be reduced to nothing but beasts, yet if they set their standards by capitalised Reason, they would inevitably fall short since they were men after all and not gods.

The way out of this dilemma was found as the concept of interest was wedged *in between* these two traditional sources of motivation. Interests were seen to partake of the better nature of each of them: it was the passion of self-love upgraded and contained by man's reasoning capacity, or alternatively, divine or natural Reason given direction and force through the passions.<sup>12</sup> To 'act in one's interests' thus came to imply an element of reflection, deliberation and calculation through which both the destructiveness of the passions and the ineffectuality of the transcendental precepts could be avoided. If men only followed their interests both individual happiness and social peace would be assured. 'Interests', as the constantly repeated late-seventeenth-century slogan went, 'Will Not Lie.'<sup>13</sup>

From the point of view of a study of international politics and war, the history of the concept of interest has a particular significance.<sup>14</sup> In fact, interests were originally always attached to the state and to the prince who acted in its name; interests were first always thought of as *state* interests, and only later did the concept come to be attached to private groups or individuals.<sup>15</sup> This *raison d'état* was supposed to do battle on two fronts. It was, first of all, a reason which belonged exclusively to the state and not to God, and as such it freed the prince who followed it from the stipulations of traditional moral or religious laws.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the concept distinguished the momentary passions and whims of the ruler in his or her private capacity from the careful reflections which the conduct of foreign policy required.<sup>17</sup> 'Les princes commandent aux peuples, et l'intérêt commande aux princes.'<sup>18</sup>

Since state interests were regarded as having an immutable, law-like, character, however, it seemed they could be defined by outside observers just as easily as by the princes themselves. In fact the concept of interests seemed to provide such outside observers with an objective way of conceptualising the actions required by each country. Enthralled by this new possibility a number of scholars set out to calculate state interests in mathematical terms and to gather them into large matrices and tables.<sup>19</sup>



With the help of such tables, it was argued, it could be established with scientific accuracy which actions were beneficial, and which detrimental, to each country and hence what a country should, and should not, do.

This first science of international politics did not, however, get very far. As it turned out, interests were far less predictable than the Newtonian forces through which the natural world had been described, yet they were also much less stable than the God- or Nature-given commands which had been taken as valid during the Middle Ages. As long as the state had been governed by capitalised Reason, it had had a *telos*, a goal, and the paramount task of the prince had been to discover this goal and to cultivate the virtues which would make it possible for him or her to reach it. Once reason was spelled in the lower case, however, and seen as a mere calculating device, it became highly unclear what it in fact was that moved princes to act and by what standards their actions should be judged. The simplest solution here would of course have been to dilute the concept of interests and to use it as a mere short-hand for whichever course of action a given prince happened to fancy. Yet this was a move which the first scientists of inter-state affairs stubbornly refused to make since it would have been to invite all the unruly passions back into the analysis. The concept, they agreed, *had to* refer to something more than the particular content which a particular prince was prepared to give it. What this 'more' was, however, was never satisfactorily explained. Thus whereas the medieval standard of state conduct had been difficult to *attain*, the new standard set by interest turned out to be correspondingly difficult to *define*.<sup>20</sup> As a result any science built upon it was destined to remain a pseudo-science whose hypotheses could be verified, but never falsified.<sup>21</sup>

Although the concept never could be satisfactorily defined in substantive terms, an *Ersatz* solution was discovered through the notion of power. Even if we cannot say what interests are, it was argued, we can dodge the entire issue by granting that power is needed in order to attain our goals *however these goals are defined*. This solution to the problem had a particular attraction since it seemed to allow scientific objectivity back into the analysis: by equating interests with the means of assuring the satisfaction of desire rather than with any particular, substantive, goods, the concept would no longer be at the mercy of subjective interpretations. No matter what the time and the circumstances, a state would always need power in order to get what it wanted. However, since states often desire the same things, power had to be thought of not only as power over objects, but also as power over other states. A state had to make sure that it was more powerful than its neighbours, or, at a minimum, that it had enough power to assure its own self-preservation. Once this analytical step was taken,

however, the early modern scholars had come full circle and the original Hobbesian state-of-nature problem was reintroduced. In the end it hardly mattered if it, as Hobbes had claimed, was men's passions that made them seek power, or if, as the early modern political scientists argued, it was their interests. Life was just as insecure in either case, and order in inter-state affairs just as unattainable.

If we leave these early modern discussions for a moment and return to our own century, we find arguments which are strikingly similar both in tone and in content. This is especially true for the so-called 'realist school' of international relations scholars comprising writers such as E. H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. The realists' world view is explicitly modelled on Hobbes', and just as the Hobbesian state of nature lacked a common authority, world politics is, according to the realists, best described as an 'anarchy' or a 'self-help system'. In an anarchical world, security can only be guaranteed by means of power and a state can only be secure to the extent that it has power over other states. Moreover, since one state's security is another state's insecurity, one state's pursuit of power will always encroach upon the similar pursuits of other states. As a result, arms races, alliance politics and fear become constant features of world politics and war an ever-present threat.

There are, however, ways for statesmen to protect their countries, and as Hans Morgenthau stressed in adopting and reworking the concept of *raison d'état*, the 'national interest' will tell a statesman how to do it.<sup>22</sup> If statesmen only let the national interest guide their actions, they will eschew ideological goals and instead concentrate on power: they will make sure that their countries possess as much power as possible, or at least enough power to guarantee their own security and survival. To act in this fashion is an imperative of statecraft which can be equated to a natural law, and just like his late-seventeenth-century predecessors, Morgenthau believed that this law could provide a foundation on which a science of international politics could be built.<sup>23</sup> Just like Hobbes, Morgenthau was making deductions from initial premises which he required reason to accept, and just as for Hobbes, theory in this way became the measure of reality rather than the other way around.

The work of Morgenthau, Waltz and other scholars of the realist school has simultaneously been very influential and very much contested, and this is perhaps especially true for their treatment of the concept of national interests. As critics have pointed out, the concept has never been defined in clear enough terms to be particularly useful. Although the claim that states pursue power might sound plausible enough, the realists were never able to

convincingly demonstrate what power means in each particular case or how much of it a given state needs.<sup>24</sup> As a consequence the concept can neither serve as much of a practical guideline for politicians, nor as an analytical tool with the help of which precise scientific predictions can be made. Power is, after all, only an *Ersatz* for an interest which cannot be defined in substantive terms, and as such it will always have a very ambiguous relation to actual foreign policy.

In addition, and as the concrete events of the Cold War clearly demonstrated, Morgenthau's distinction between actions undertaken in the pursuit of power and actions undertaken in the pursuit of ideological goals can generally not be made in the course of actual, day-to-day, decision-making. Since one person's ideological crusade is often another person's *Realpolitik*, the line between passion and level-headedness can often not be drawn. In fact, which actions are, or are not, in a country's national interest to undertake can only conclusively be decided *after the fact*. If an action has brought power and security to a country, it was undertaken in the national interest; if it has not, it was not. Thus while the realists' theory of international politics can often be verified, it is – just as the hypotheses presented by the late-seventeenth-century scholars – next to impossible to falsify, and as such the realist theory of world politics too is destined to be not a science, but a pseudo-science.

Following this line of reasoning many writers have concluded that the concept of interests – national or other – is entirely devoid of analytical value. And if this is our view, the obvious thing to do is of course to take that step which the early modern philosophers so stubbornly refused to take: to see interests as nothing but the particular preferences of some particular person, group or state.<sup>25</sup> As we saw above, this is the precise conclusion reached by scholars who explain the initiation of war in terms of the workings of the mechanisms through which decisions are made. Yet not all contemporary writers have been willing to give up quite as easily as all this and attempts are still made to give the concept more of an analytical content. In contrast to the attempts made in earlier eras, however, there is now only one line that needs to be drawn: since the precepts of God and Nature no longer play much of a role in political affairs, the difference between interests and transcendental Reason is no longer a concern. The only relevant question today is instead how interests should be distinguished from people's momentary passions and whims. There are at least three different answers to this question.

The first answer builds on the notion of rationality but extends it to include also *qualitative* requirements. To act in one's interest, according to

this definition, is not to act in terms of just any temporary preference, but rather to act in terms of that particular preference which survives after an extended and meticulous process of deliberation. Before we embark upon an action, in other words, we must first figure out what it is that we 'really want'.<sup>26</sup> Since interests in this way will still depend on the preferences held by some particular person or state they will inevitably be defined differently in different cases, yet they can still be judged by outsiders with regard to the degree and profundity of the self-reflection involved. The person did not act in his or her 'best interests', such an outside observer might conclude, since the person did not take the time to consider his or her preferences thoroughly enough.

The second answer takes a more sociological view of the matter and defines interests in terms of the social structure in which a person or a state is located. We all have our social roles, it is pointed out, and each role comes equipped with a script which we are required to follow. To act in one's interests in such a social setting is simply to do what our structurally defined position requires us to do; to play one's role as convincingly and conscientiously as possible.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly it can be said to be in the 'objective interest' of a worker to increase his or her wage, and in the 'objective interest' of an employer to keep that wage down. Similarly a state in the periphery of world politics will have other 'objective interests' from those of a state in the centre.

The third answer extends Hobbes' reasoning to cover not only individuals but also states, and defines interests in terms of the bare minimum requirement of self-preservation. Since we all want to survive, survival – of a person or a group – must be an objective value. If we did not want our own preservation we could want nothing else and neither preferences nor social roles could be attached to us. To act in one's interest could certainly mean more than this, but, it is argued, it must at least mean this much.

Although these attempts to rescue the independent analytical role of the concept of interests differ in their solutions, there is one important feature they all share: in all three cases the way in which interests are defined comes to depend on how the 'one' is defined to whom the interests in question are said to belong. We can know what our interests are, it seems, only if we can first settle the question of who or what we are ourselves. Thus to ask someone to make a careful deliberation of a preference is to ask that person to figure out what he or she 'really wants', but in order to answer that question he or she will first have to figure out who he or she 'really is'. Only as that *real* person can he or she have *real* interests.<sup>28</sup> Similarly to ask a person to act in terms of a structurally defined role is necessarily to ask that person to consider what the relationship is between that role and the person he or

she takes him- or herself to be. A structurally defined interest can only be in a person's 'objective interest' if the role and the person coincide.<sup>29</sup> Analogously, a definition of an interest given in terms of self-preservation will inevitably force us to ask who that 'self' is that is to be preserved.<sup>30</sup> We must first figure out what it means 'to be' before being can be regarded as a supreme value.

In a way, of course, none of this is very surprising. Questions regarding identities must always take precedence over questions regarding interests. It is only *as some-one* that we can have an interest *in some-thing*; it is *only once we know who we are that we can know what we want*. Once the problem is seen in this fashion, however, it should be obvious that all the real analytical work is carried out not by the concept of interests, but rather by the concept of the self. The former concept may perhaps still be given an independent definition, but this can only be done once the latter concept has been defined, at least in a preliminary fashion. Modern interests require modern selves.

### Modern selves

Above we discussed how interests were introduced in political analyses at the end of the seventeenth century in an attempt to make men into something more than beasts, while at the same time acknowledging that they were less than gods. Yet it was to remain profoundly unclear precisely what kinds of beings this intermediate category consisted of; who that 'one' – that 'self' – actually was to whom interests were said to belong. As we might suspect early modern philosophers paid explicit and careful attention to this question, and if we accept a schematic presentation of a very complex and multi-faceted intellectual development, we could say that the modern tradition contains two distinct answers to it: the atomism of Hobbes and John Locke, among others, and the empiricism of David Hume.<sup>31</sup>

Let us begin with atomism. As we saw above, the men whom Hobbes described had two components: desires, but also a reasoning capacity which could be compared to a calculating device. Both desire and reason were given by nature and consequently acquired *before* man entered into interaction with other men. The individual existed prior to, and outside of, interaction with others. Or, as Hobbes made clear, the life of man in the state of nature had not only been 'poor, nasty, brutish and short', but also 'solitary'. Hobbes' passionate, yet reasonable, pre-social man was the premise from which all the conclusions of his political philosophy were deduced. Man had a desire for 'power after power' and the 'warre of every man against every man' which this quest produced only came to an end



through the intervention of Leviathan who organised the passions of men, pacified social interaction and brought order to society.

While these conclusions were in many respects strikingly new, the structure of Hobbes' argument did still retain an important feature of the arguments traditionally presented by medieval philosophers. Also according to Hobbes it was through an *external* intervention into their lives that men were to be saved from themselves; Leviathan was certainly 'mortal', not eternal, but as Hobbes explained, it was nevertheless 'a God'.<sup>32</sup> If we simplify a complex line of development, we could perhaps say that subsequent philosophers who built on Hobbes' work would come to focus on ways through which the external, coercive, authority of Leviathan could be *internalised*, moved *into* man. Here, reason was given an increasingly important role as it was upgraded from being a mere calculating device to a faculty vested also with the powers of judgement. John Locke, for one, agreed with Hobbes that man is a pre-social creature of both passion and reason, but our reason, according to Locke, allows us not only to deduce given conclusions from given premises, but more importantly also to reflect upon ourselves and upon our passions. As a result of these reflections we can strengthen some of our passions, weaken some others, and in this way mould, remake and discipline ourselves.

In order for reason to work as a tool of self-reformation, however, a new stance was required *vis-à-vis* all the sensations and impressions that a person encountered in the course of his or her everyday life. Modern, rational, man had to disengage both from the world as it was given to the senses and from him- or herself as a creature of desires, feelings and inclinations.<sup>33</sup> Only if the world no longer elicited desire could reason function properly. Similarly modern man had to objectify his or her own self by learning how to suspend the immediate phenomenological dimension of experience and regard the self as a thing equal to all other things in the world.<sup>34</sup> The self which emerged as a result of these processes of disengagement and objectification was thus neither in the world nor in the sensations which the world aroused, but instead in that transcendental faculty which made disengagement, objectification and reform possible.<sup>35</sup>

For subsequent writers it was a very short step to associate the atomistic conception of the self with 'inwardness' and with a sense of 'separation'. Consciousness was 'inside' man, as it were; consciousness was turned towards itself and thus separated both from the sensations and emotions which the world arose and from the consciousness of other selves.<sup>36</sup> Over the years a large number of metaphors have been invoked in order to describe this radical split: there is a 'wall' between our selves and the world which separates that which is 'in' our minds and that which is 'in' society;



we have a 'core' at the centre of our being; there are 'depths' to our selves that we can probe through self-reflection or psychoanalysis.<sup>37</sup> On 'our side' of the wall, in 'our depths', and 'at the core', we are as we 'really are', while as soon as we break through the wall, or move away from the core or the depth, we become increasingly insubstantial and superficial. Not surprisingly, the distinction between outside and inside, depth and surface, soon also came to be equated with a distinction between falsity and truth. The inside man was the true man, while the outside man was the false copy.

As we saw in our discussion of theories of war initiation above, the belief in the existence of a 'true person' has had far-reaching implications for the way in which scholars have explained social phenomena. As many social scientists have implied, if there is a real person inside us then that person must also be stable over time and between different social contexts; there is one and only one person who processes information, who makes choices and who acts. Since this is the case we should also expect that one person to be able to rank his or her preferences consistently at each given moment and consistently over time. Or, alternatively, an outside observer should be able to do it in the person's stead.<sup>38</sup> Historians too have often invoked the same presupposition when organising and assessing their primary source material. As they commonly have argued, the more private the source, the closer it is likely to be to the 'real person' and the more likely it is to provide us with 'real reasons' for an action – to tell us what a person 'really' thinks, wants or feels. Conversely, the more public the source, the more lies, propaganda and *post hoc* rationalisations it is likely to contain. A proper explanation of an action must consequently be based on the former kind of material and not on the latter.

Although these were powerful and influential arguments, the atomistic conception of the person was soon subject to a radical, and potentially very damaging, critique. As David Hume argued, scientists should investigate what the world is like, not simply posit the existence of things in an *a priori* fashion. What we 'are' should not be settled by definitional fiat, but instead be determined with the help of the empirical evidence provided by our senses.

If we investigate the question of the self in this fashion, we will, however, inevitably be disappointed. For a self to exist, Hume believed, there must be a sense impression which corresponds to this idea, and since we take ourselves to exist continuously, we must be talking about a sense impression which remains the same throughout the entire course of our lives. But since there are no such constant and invariable sense impressions, Hume concluded, no idea of the self can be derived from them and there can

consequently be no self and no personal identity continuously extended over time. When subject to an empirical investigation, the self vanishes. While other people perhaps may 'perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls *himself*', Hume said, 'I am certain there is no such principle in me.'<sup>39</sup>

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.<sup>40</sup>

Unable to find empirical evidence for a constant and continuous self, Hume concluded that what we are is 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement'.<sup>41</sup> Yet even if the existence of the self is difficult to prove with the help of empirical data, it is still an indisputable fact that we do take our selves to exist. In order to explain this phenomenological truism Hume introduced the notion of the imagination. It is the imagination and its tendency to impose constancy, coherence and causality on our perceptions which allows us to see a man as the same even as he grows old, fat and senile. If the change is only slow and gradual enough, imagination can transform diversity into identity.<sup>42</sup>

Since a person is but a bundle of perceptions, it followed that there can be no transcendental mechanism or principle which unites the self or which serves the purpose of self-reflection and self-reformation. Just like Hobbes, Hume regarded reason as a mere calculating device and as only 'the slave of the passions'. Similarly, at the level of motivation, the loose bundle of perceptions which was the self corresponded to nothing but a loose bundle of preferences.<sup>43</sup> Very much like our perceptions, our preferences replace each other with great rapidity and are in constant flux and movement, and it is only with the help of the imagination that we are able to organise them hierarchically and to make choices between them.

As I pointed out above, interests were initially attached to states and only later to groups and individuals, but if both states and individuals can be thought of as 'subjects' to whom interests can be attached, there seems to be some form of connection between the two. Again there is both an atomistic and an empiricist interpretation of this connection.

For Hobbes the connection between man and state was forged through Leviathan who could be thought of as a 'feigned' or 'artificial' person.<sup>44</sup> The state was a *homo artificialis*, and as the picture on the cover-page of his most famous book made clear, Leviathan was literally *made up* of the

people it ruled. Contemporary realist scholars of international relations who have modelled their descriptions of world politics on Hobbes' state of nature typically rely on Hobbes' concept of a person in their description of the state. The realists' state too is an artificial person equipped with one set of preferences; it is a 'unified, purposive, utility-maximising, actor'. And just like Hobbes' pre-social man, the realists' state is equipped with desires and reason *prior to* entering into interaction with other states. The state has a pre-social urge to acquire 'power after power', and a pre-social national interest which can minimally be equated with an urge to self-preservation and maximally with world domination.<sup>45</sup> Parenthetically, the realists may perhaps concede that the state also is an institution located in time, and that as such it is inevitably subject to change, but such statements always take the form of empirical observations and *ad hoc* concessions.<sup>46</sup> For the purposes of their theories, the realists must take the state for granted; only if the state is considered as *a priori* given can there be an entity to whom a primary urge to self-preservation can be ascribed.

Once the state has been portrayed as a Hobbesian person, however, it has also become vulnerable to an empiricist, Humean, critique. In fact, Hume too found a deep affinity between persons and states, although for him the relationship between the two worked the other way around. Individuals were 'united' and 'one' not by virtue of some inherent, pre-social, components, but because they could be organised in the same manner as a state. The unity which our imagination imposes on our selves, Hume argued, is the same unity which the 'reciprocal ties of government and subordination' impose on the members of a commonwealth.<sup>47</sup> The implications of this view are far-reaching and potentially radical: if only empirical sensations are real, and if it is only by means of the imagination that we impose a self on one particular bundle of these, then the subjects we identify at present can have no privileged or protected status.<sup>48</sup> If the identity of both individuals and states are but products of our imagination, it seems we could go on imagining any number of other entities besides these two.

A number of contemporary international relations scholars – we could call them 'pluralists' – have picked up on hints like these and subjected the realists' state to an empirical, Humean, critique.<sup>49</sup> The realists' description is flawed, these scholars have argued, since it is based on a flawed view of science: instead of merely positing the existence of the state in an *a priori* fashion, we should study world politics without any prior presumptions regarding what we will find. If we do this, we will soon discover that while the state may still be an important actor, it competes with a host of trans-, supra- and sub-national actors that form links and alliances without much regard for national borders. As a result, states have become increasingly

interdependent and the very distinction between domestic and foreign policy has become increasingly blurred.<sup>50</sup> This conclusion is further reinforced if we turn to a study of the operations of the state machinery itself. As the pluralists point out, the state, far from being a 'united, purposive, rational actor', is instead constituted by a multitude of different sub-national bureaucracies and organisations, each with its own agenda, its own set of goals and its own standard operational procedures.<sup>51</sup> Under these conditions, foreign policy will not, as the realists argue, be the result of rational calculations undertaken at the level of the state, but instead the result of a multitude of bargains struck at various sub-levels. That which we call 'the state' is only a loose set of ordered preferences which are contingent upon day-to-day politicking.

How should we arbitrate between these two descriptions? Is the state a transcendental atomistic unit or is it a mere bundle of sub-state actors and their particular policy preferences? Impressionistically we may perhaps feel that there is something to both pictures. Curiously enough, when viewed from a distance in time or in space the state appears as both unified and purposive, yet when viewed close up the same state somehow loses both its unity and its sense of purpose. There is a puzzle here: while we need to take the state for granted in order to understand many of the events and phenomena that occur in world politics, we will not find it when we look for it. The state simply vanishes somewhere in between the moment when we posited it as necessary and the moment when we started investigating it. Where, then, is it? Does the state, or does it not, *exist*?

The mystery of the vanishing state is in fact only a special case of a puzzle which plagues all attempts to define the concept of the person within the parameters set by the modern orthodoxy. We may hesitate to give man an irreducible transcendental status, but if we reject all talk of transcendence it seems we also have to reject the very notion of a self which is permanent over time. Similarly while we may not accept a state which is understood as a precondition of world politics, we may be equally unwilling to accept a state which simply is not there. If we are forced to choose between a pre-social and transcendental self *à la* Hobbes or a self which is a mere bundle of perceptions and preferences *à la* Hume the question of existence can never be conclusively resolved.<sup>52</sup>

Put somewhat differently, the problem with the atomistic conception is that it puts the person on too secure an ontological footing. For Hobbes, the individual existed prior to, and outside of, interaction with other men, and although Leviathan could shape the passions of its subjects, it was not able to undo their pre-social nature since this would have undermined the

very foundation on which the authority of Leviathan itself rested. The same thing is true also of the Lockean self who withdrew from society and from its own experiences through a process of disengagement and objectification. Once individuals had withdrawn in this fashion, the influences of society could never completely reach them; they had an extra-social component which provided them with an extra-social point of view from which the world could be judged. By structuring their argument in this fashion, however, atomistic theories effectively removed the status of the subject from the scope of the investigation: since the subject became the presupposition on which the theory itself was built, the subject could not be questioned and since it could not be questioned it could not be properly investigated.

As far as the realists' view of the state is concerned, this metaphysics resulted in a static and state-centric theory.<sup>53</sup> As the pluralistic critics made clear, the realists' state cannot be studied empirically without disappearing from sight, but neither can it be studied historically since a time period without a state and without a state system is ruled out by definition. We cannot, for example, give a plausible account of the *formation* of the state during the Renaissance and the early modern era, but neither can we say anything particularly enlightening regarding a possible future in which the state no longer remains the most important political unit. To the extent that history is written from a realist point of view, it will remain a whiggish kind of history which tells us the success story of how the state emerged from the medieval, universalistic, world. What this story misses is the indeterminacy of each moment along the way to this happy conclusion and the fact that there was never anything inevitable in this development.

The Humean self, on the other hand, is simply too empty and too indeterminate. It has *no* grounding and is in fact no true self. If the person is reduced to a mere bundle of perceptions or preferences, there is no longer anyone left *to whom* these perceptions and preferences can be said to *belong*. As a consequence the notion of choice will all but disappear from the analysis. Since there is no self, there is no one around who can assess and choose between different alternatives, and what a person does will instead have to be ascribed to custom, habit or physical necessity.<sup>54</sup> Yet, as many writers have pointed out, there is a fundamental irony in the way Hume pursued his own investigation of this matter.<sup>55</sup> Although he rejected the notion of a self, he is at the same time presupposing its existence in the very process of delivering his proof. 'For *my* part', he said, 'when *I* enter . . . what *I* call *myself*, *I* always stumble . . .'; '*I* never catch *myself* at any time . . .'<sup>56</sup> Thus although Hume rejected the concept of a self, he could do so only *as someone* who 'entered', 'stumbled', and 'failed to catch', etc.<sup>57</sup> In the end he

consequently never talked only about bundles of perceptions and preferences, but also about a *someone* for whom these perceptions and preferences existed. Who this someone was, however, Hume could not say.

As heirs to the empiricist tradition, the pluralists have inherited this ambiguity and the state which they fail to acknowledge explicitly will always instead be tacitly assumed. They cannot fail to use a number of very revealing pronouns and fill their works with references to 'American foreign policy considerations', 'Cuban military installations', 'recalcitrant countries in the Third World' and European states who are 'playing their cards close to their chests'. And while the pluralists may explain that this way of speaking makes use of what is nothing more than a metaphor, it is nevertheless highly peculiar that this particular terminology should be so difficult to avoid. If these indeed are 'mere metaphors' we would expect the pluralists to choose some other – some *non-anthropomorphic* – metaphors from time to time. If these scholars are correct, and the state indeed does not exist, it should be far easier to stop talking about it.

The fundamental problem with both atomism and empiricism is, in other words, that they have looked for something which cannot be found. The question of existence has been formulated in such a way that the only acceptable answer had to be phrased in terms of 'real existence', and as a consequence the debate soon turned into a referendum on the possibility of transcendence. If we, with the atomists, accept the possibility of transcendence, then we can accept that the self can be placed on this ontological footing; if we, with the empiricists, reject the possibility of transcendence, then we must also reject the entire notion of a self. Either way, however, the self vanishes: *from* the world with Hobbes and the realists, and *in* the world with Hume and the pluralists.<sup>58</sup>

Surely this conclusion is unsatisfactory. It is a fundamental phenomenological and common-sense fact that we exist and everything we do or say throughout our lives presupposes this existence. Analogously, we know that the state exists and every – almost every – analysis of world politics takes this fact for granted. Yet if we want to be able to talk about the self as a *presence* rather than an absence, it seems the self must be established on an entirely different footing.

### Modern actions

The last part of our investigation concerns the relationship between interests and actions. People act in their interests, the modern orthodoxy has it, they do what they do *because* it is in their interest to do it. Since this is the case it seems outside observers would be justified in explaining those same



actions by reference to the interest that brought them about. The connection between interests and actions seems perfectly straightforward, even truistic: given a certain interest we simply act.

There are, however, two caveats to be added to this simple syllogism. The first concerns cases in which an outside agent intervenes and somehow compels us to act differently from how we had intended.<sup>59</sup> If something, or someone, stops us we will obviously not be able to do what we had intended. The second caveat concerns information: in order to act rationally we must make sure that the options we consider are 'feasible', that is, that the objects we desire do indeed exist and that we possess the appropriate means to reach them.<sup>60</sup> If we find out that this is not the case we should alter our preferences accordingly. Given these two caveats, however, the causal connection between interests and actions is automatic: if we conclude that a certain action is the appropriate means to further a certain interest, we have a persuasive reason for undertaking the action. Human beings operate much like, say, juke-boxes: guidance is automatic once the right buttons of factual information are pressed.<sup>61</sup> Persuasive reasons cannot fail to persuade.

Yet the simple fact is of course that they often do. Persuasive reasons do not always persuade and they do not always result in actions. As we all know, it is perfectly possible to have an interest in doing something and yet to be unable to act upon this interest even in the absence of outside interference or contradictory information.<sup>62</sup> 'I do not understand my own actions', apostle Paul famously agonised in his *Letter to the Romans*, 'for I do not what I want, but I do the very thing I hate'.<sup>63</sup> Following St Paul, religious thinkers have talked about this curious phenomenon as 'succumbing to temptation', or as the 'flesh against the spirit', and modern social theorists have talked about *akrasia*, or 'weakness of the will'.<sup>64</sup> To a defender of the modern, orthodox, way of explaining actions, cases like these must be profoundly puzzling – somehow there seem to be *two* persons within the one person that we take ourselves to be, or *two* wills within our one will. And two persons or two wills, moreover, with radically diverging sets of preferences: while the one wants to stop smoking, drinking, or eating potato crisps in front of the television set, the other one lights another cigarette, pours another drink or puts the hand back into the bag.<sup>65</sup> If we indeed regarded a particular reason as persuasive, and if we could have acted upon it, why did we not?<sup>66</sup>

Puzzles such as these should make us reconsider the nature of the causal connection between interests and actions. Although the notion of 'having interests' and 'acting in terms of the interests we have' are indeed closely related, the mere fact that we specify an interest in a certain fashion is not

enough to bring about a certain action. There is no necessary connection between the level at which we interpret the world and the level at which we act in the world. What tells decisively in favour of a certain action may give a *ground* for a change of attitude, and what gives a ground may become a person's motive, but there is no contradiction involved in saying that that which gave such a ground failed to motivate. The concept of a 'ground' implies nothing more than that known grounds are available to supply guidance to someone who is willing to *take* guidance from them.<sup>67</sup> Another way of putting the same point is to say that there will always be a discrepancy between *having* interests and *being moved by* interests; we have a reason *for* acting, on the one hand, and a reason *from which* we act, on the other. Having a reason to do something does not necessarily mean that we actually do what we do for those reasons.<sup>68</sup>

The category of interests seems, in other words, to be far too passive to fit comfortably with the dynamic category which is that of actions. A person's deliberations regarding his or her interests are activities that go on in the mind and they are therefore by nature hidden, yet actions are things that occur in the world and which appear before others.<sup>69</sup> Since thoughts and actions are very closely related we tend to overlook the difference between the two and 'rational choice' is treated as the same as 'rational action'. Yet as Hannah Arendt among others has stressed, the two are indeed radically different. Deliberations and thoughts are not possible in the world of appearances, but must always take place outside of it. In order to think we must always withdraw from that which is immediately present to our senses since thinking entails a process of *re*-presentation and *de*-sensing.<sup>70</sup> Thus thinking will necessarily come to interrupt any doing; 'all thinking demands a *stop-and-think*'.<sup>71</sup>

This kind of withdrawal is of course precisely what the scientists of the early modern era sought to attain: in order to gain a scientifically based knowledge of the world, the inquiring mind had to retreat to a place outside of it. From this vantage point, everything which appealed to the desires of man inevitably seemed less real than that which made the world scientifically analysable. While 'primary qualities' like shape, mass and form were objectively given, 'secondary qualities' like beauty, taste and sound always depended for their existence on the subjective experiences of each perceiver.<sup>72</sup> Yet while it is easy to desire something beautiful, tasty or nice-sounding, we cannot – or at least not as easily – desire a mere shape, mass or form.<sup>73</sup> As a result of this objectification of the world, the causal connection between thought and action was rendered increasingly tenuous. Once man had withdrawn to an objective, intellectual, stance, the return to the world of action was neither simple nor automatic.<sup>74</sup> Since Thomas Hobbes

regarded the will as 'the last Appetite in Deliberating', 'immediately adhaering to the action, or to the omission thereof', he could still conceive of it as a 'lever' in the mind which 'pushed' a person to act.<sup>75</sup> Yet once the self stopped living in, and through, its experiences – once my experiences came to be seen as experiences which could just as well be someone else's – no such simple mechanism could be conceived of. As a result the intentional dimension of experience was suspended and divested of its immediate causal powers.<sup>76</sup>

While this conclusion seems to undermine the entire notion that interests can be causes of actions, we should nevertheless not forget that the two are closely related. Knowledge of a persuasive reason is knowledge of something highly relevant; our concern for a certain end makes that information important which tells us how to reach it. But if this indeed is the case the question becomes how we can move from the one to the other; what it would take, in other words, to act on the basis of the interests that we have. What we need here, it seems, is some sort of a mechanism which restores the immediacy and urgency of action and forces us to leave our detached, reflective, stance.

This 'something' is best described as a change in mental attitude. We cannot just contemplate an interest in a passive manner, but we must be made to *see it as* something which requires our intervention, our action. The difference between these two stances could perhaps be expressed as the difference between what it means 'to know' something and what it means 'to be thinking of' something.<sup>77</sup> 'To know' something is a capacity; we may, for example, know what effects alcohol may have on the liver. 'To be thinking of' something, on the other hand, is not a capacity, but instead the *activation* of a capacity. 'To be thinking of something' means that we tell ourselves the story of that which we know, and that we have, bring and keep this story before ourselves at the time when it matters. It is, for example, to tell oneself the story of the effects that alcohol may have on the liver before one pours oneself another glass. Only if activated – if 'minded' – in this fashion will what we know to be persuasively relevant in fact come to persuade.<sup>78</sup> How this process of 'activation', 'minding', or 'seeing as', takes place, however, modern orthodox scholars are unable to say.

### **The modern orthodoxy**

In this chapter we analysed what I called the 'modern orthodoxy', the corresponding notions that people, but also collective entities like states, 'act in their interests'; and that actions can be explained by reference to the

interests that brought these actions about. In order to learn more about this explanatory model we investigated what it in fact might mean to 'act in one's interests'. What are 'interests'? we asked; who, or what, is the 'one' to whom these interests are attached?; how does the causal connection between interests and actions operate?

Turning to 'interests' first of all we noted how the concept was introduced in the late seventeenth century and wedged in between the passions, on the one hand, and the commands of God or Nature, on the other. As such the new concept partook of the best features of both these traditional sources of motivation while avoiding their drawbacks. 'Interests' were far less destructive than the passions, but also far more scrutable – and far easier to follow – than transcendental commands. The concept was perfectly suited for the men of the modern era: it acknowledged that they were more than beasts while at the same time recognising that they were less than gods. From the outset interests were intimately connected to the state: each state had a *raison d'état*, and the prince who followed it would bring prosperity and security to his or her country. Furthermore, since national interests were objectively given they seemed to provide a foundation on which a science of international politics could be erected. Yet it was to remain profoundly unclear precisely what actions were, or were not, in the interest of a state to undertake, and as a result the concept was in practice equated with whatever preferences a statesman, or an outside observer, happened to hold. The *Ersatz* solution of talking, not directly about interests, but rather about the means through which they could be satisfied, never quite settled the issue. The concept of power turned out to be just as ambiguous as the concept it was designed to replace and it never provided much guidance for actual policy-making. While scholars have continued to give the concept of interests an analytical definition, such attempts will, I concluded, always be parasitic upon the prior definition of the subject to whom these interests are said to belong. It is only once we know who we are that we can know what we want.

When we turned to an investigation of the ways in which scholars have identified this modern subject we found two main alternatives: an atomistic self whose nature was determined prior to social interaction and an empiricist self which could be reduced to a bundle of perceptions and preferences. In both versions the connection was very close between the subject understood as an individual and as a state and, as we noted, twentieth-century social scientists have relied heavily on these early modern conceptualisations. The state which the realists described was given prior to inter-state interaction and taken as the starting-point of their theories; the state which the pluralists described was a 'mere metaphor' reducible to the sub-state

actors which comprised it. As I concluded, however, neither way of conceptualising the self is particularly satisfactory: if we go with the atomists, the self will become a transcendently given and a precondition for theorising which itself is unanalysable; if we go with the empiricists, the self will be reduced to a multitude of ever-fleeting sensations. Either way the self vanishes: *from* the world with Hobbes and the atomists, and *in* the world with Hume and the empiricists. If we insist on the existence of a self which is 'here' and 'present to itself' neither solution is adequate.

In conclusion I added a note on the nature of the causal connection between the interests that we have and the actions we perform. Modern scholars, we said, generally take it as an axiom that persuasive reasons always persuade and that actions are automatic given a certain information; 'rational choice' is taken to be the same as 'rational action'. Yet as we pointed out, thought and action are radically separated, at least for the modern men who distanced themselves from the world in order to reflect upon it in a cool and objective fashion. In order for interests to become causes of actions, I concluded, they must be 'activated' at the time when it matters; they must come to be seen as demanding our intervention. How this happens, however, modern orthodox scholars cannot even begin to consider.

The conclusion which forces itself upon us is consequently that the modern orthodoxy has surprisingly little to say regarding what it might mean to 'act in one's interests'. Although the formula has been invoked by scholars of every brand, size and shape, and in order to explain every conceivable type of action, its key concepts remain undefined. No one has been able to come up with a satisfactory definition of the concept of interests since such a definition has required a prior definition of the selves to whom these interests are said to belong. Yet no one has been able to give these selves a satisfactory definition since they have simply vanished under inspection. And in any case, no modern orthodox scholar has been able to tell us what the causal link is between the interests that we have and the actions we perform.

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## A narrative theory of action

In this chapter we will look for a way to solve the puzzles which the previous chapter documented: the modern orthodoxy must be given a heterodox reformulation. Perhaps we could call this alternative statement a 'narrative theory of action' by virtue of the crucial role it accords to narrative. It is through the stories that we tell that we make sense of ourselves and our world, and it is on the basis of these stories that we act. As I will argue, a study of narrative allows us not only to reconceptualise the notion of interests, but it also puts the modern subject – both the individual and the state – on a more acceptable ontological footing. In addition, narrative provides us with a causal mechanism through which the detached realm of thought can come to be connected to the dynamic realm of action.

### **Making sense**

Let us begin by stressing the importance of meaning in human affairs. While the natural world in and of itself contains no meanings, the social world emphatically does – ultimately it is meaning which separates us from nature. Meaning is also what constitutes the difference between an 'action' and a 'behaviour'. While even robots can behave, only human beings can properly be said to act since only human beings have purposes, intentions and goals.

In order to give meaning to the world we must divide it into categories; in order to *think* we must find a way of cutting things up and of telling one thing apart from all the other things that surround it. Only in this way are we able to say what one thing is and what it is not. Yet, curiously enough, thought also presupposes the exact opposite operation: the world which we have cut into pieces must somehow be put back together again. As the roots of the Latin root *cogitare* – actually, *co-agitare* – indicate, things must be



'forced together', or 'united forcefully', before we can properly grasp them. Only as a result of these two consecutive operations – this cutting up and this pasting together – can we make sense of things.

The most convenient way in which to cut into the world is to avail oneself of a semiotic system such as a language. Words tell us what things are but also what they are not; with the help of words we can easily separate things from one another. Yet even though we perform these operations effortlessly every day of our lives, it is far from clear how exactly we manage to do it; how we know which words go with which things. If we allow a radical simplification of the many possible answers to this question, there are two main alternatives open to us.

The first alternative we could call essentialism. According to this view, the categories of language are natural; it is nature itself which presents us with the separations we need. Definitions do, as it were, arise *out of* the world, and language reflects properties which exist independently of people or other beings experiencing them. Rocks would be there – just as hard and as solid – even if we were not. Hence, it seems that when we know how to use a word correctly, we also know what that thing 'really is'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet while this view may seem plausible as far as concrete and everyday objects are concerned, it becomes much less convincing when applied to abstract concepts. Is 'love', for example, *really* 'an intense affection for another person based on familial or personal ties'? Is 'God' *really* 'a being conceived as the perfect, omnipotent, omniscient originator and ruler of the universe'?<sup>2</sup> Yes, perhaps, we may agree, but something certainly seems to be missing from these definitions. It would be odd to say that this is what these notions 'really are' and that they cannot be anything else. Obviously, definitions vary between people, cultures and historical periods. Yet this conclusion inevitably casts doubts on the essentialist presumptions: would 'love' or 'God' still be there – just as intense and as omnipotent – even if we were not around to interpret them in these terms?

To a knotty problem such as this a nominalist view of language offers an Alexandrine solution. We should stop looking for essences, we are told, since the labels we give to things depend on nothing but custom, on usage. It has been established that an object is to be symbolised by a certain label and whenever we talk about that thing it is this convention that we adhere to. Which label to use is often a matter of intense debate, but no recategorisation of objects could ever bring us closer to a predetermined, natural, order. In the future as in the past – or from one culture to another – different labels will be invoked differently, but we cannot say which the correct label is, only whether one person's individual usage corresponds to the conventional usage.

If we accept this nominalist critique – if we accept that concepts do not arise out of the world – we have to provide an alternative account of their origin. If we fail to believe that concepts capture essences, we have to say what, if anything, they capture. One answer here is to conclude that words are entirely arbitrary, mere labels denoting mere sounds. But this is surely false. Although abstract concepts may be conventional, they are not arbitrary, and as any etymological dictionary will tell us, they are not just labels, but labels which are given *for a reason*. In fact, abstract concepts – things which we take to exist, but which we cannot see, touch, smell or hear – generally ‘borrow their vocabulary from words originally meant to correspond either to sense experience or to other experiences of ordinary life’.<sup>3</sup> Since the abstract by definition cannot be observed, we give it names of things that *can* be observed. Thus even if we cannot talk about essences and say what things ‘really are’, we can still *see* things *as* other things and say what they *are like*. That is, the abstract can be labelled, understood and given meaning with the help of metaphor. With the help of metaphor we give a thing ‘a name that belongs to something else’.<sup>4</sup>

The process of ‘seeing as’ which is characteristic of metaphor is a fundamental process of the mind which underlies all attempts to understand and explain the world. Metaphor is thus not only a feature of poetry, political rhetoric or eloquent dinner speeches, but also a feature of the most exact and matter-of-fact of our discourses. Metaphor is ubiquitous in human life since we must see things in certain ways before we can talk about them, describe or explain them. Before a historian can figure out what happened in a past era, as Hayden White puts it, the past must first be ‘pre-figured’; ‘construed as a ground inhabited by discernible figures’; cast as ‘an object of mental perception’.<sup>5</sup> Before a scientist can theorise about a certain field of study, as Max Black notes, the field in question must first be ‘modelled’; the world must be rendered as a world *of a certain kind*.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, it is not coincidental, and not the result of sloppy linguistic habits, that natural scientists talk about ‘black holes’ or atomic ‘nuclei’; that economists discuss economic ‘markets’ that are ‘in balance’; or that political philosophers see the state as an ‘organism’, a ‘clockwork mechanism’ or a ‘structure’. It is with the help of metaphors such as these that the world which our words divided is put back together again.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the ‘forcing together’ of things which is the hallmark of metaphor, we make things make sense.

Yet it is far from clear how metaphors manage to do what they do. Since metaphors define things in terms appropriate to other things, it follows that they must be false when taken literally. A very dense heavenly body is, for example, *not* a ‘hole’, and a state is neither an ‘organism’, a ‘clockwork

mechanism' nor a 'structure'. Metaphors, in short, seem to be nothing but meaningless misclassifications or category mistakes. As such, however, they must surely be *obstacles* to our understanding and not preconditions for it, as I have argued. The only thing which negates this conclusion is the simple fact that we actually do understand most metaphorical expressions. We know why heavenly bodies can be compared to 'holes' and states to 'structures'. If we think we understand these expressions, however, the question becomes how in fact we manage to do it. How can we compare things which literally cannot be compared?

As a way to think about this issue, consider the relative independence between the world and any symbolic system through which it has come to be described. Imagine a society – perhaps at the very beginning of time – in which people had to point to whatever thing they were talking about. Here the connection between words and objects was uncomplicated and direct, yet as soon as people began using language for more than the most simplistic of purposes, this immediate connection was inevitably severed. As written down, as confined to our memories, or as used in communication with others, words no longer make demonstrative references to actual things. Hence words and objects can come to be associated in ways which follow neither grammatical nor physical laws. As relatively independent, words are free to take on meanings that have little or nothing to do with their original reference. Words, we could say, begin to absorb meanings very much as though they were sponges.

To say that there are other kinds of meanings than literal ones is to say that there are other kinds of meanings than those given by the necessary and sufficient conditions of an object being categorised in a certain fashion. What something means *to us* is not a matter of how something is inserted into the dictionary's context of words, but instead a matter of how something is inserted into the context of our lives. As an example, consider the bowler hat that played such an important symbolic function in the life of Sabina, the independent-minded artist in Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In the course of Sabina's life, Kundera tells us, the bowler hat came to be associated with a number of different events and memories: the hat 'returned again and again, each time with a different meaning, and all the meanings flowed through the bowler hat like water through a riverbed'. The hat

was a bed through which each time Sabina saw another river flow, another semantic river; each time the same object would give rise to a new meaning, though all former meanings would resonate (like an echo, like a parade of echoes) together with the new one. Each new experience would resound, each time enriching the harmony.<sup>8</sup>

If we want to know what the bowler hat meant *to Sabina*, we cannot look up the word 'bowler hat' in a dictionary. The dictionary translates the word into other words, but it cannot even begin to tell us anything about the 'parades of echoes' with which it was surrounded in Sabina's mind. To understand how a person makes sense of the world is thus not primarily to understand the words he or she uses, but more fundamentally to understand the experiences and memories with which words are associated. We need to understand the 'parades of echoes', or what we could perhaps call a word's 'system of reverberations'.<sup>9</sup>

Since systems of reverberations depend on personal experiences and memories, however, they are never easy to map, and to the extent that we fail to map them we will often end up misunderstanding each other.<sup>10</sup> Yet at the same time we should not forget that no system of reverberations can be entirely subjective or idiosyncratic. There are also *collective* experiences and *shared* memories which give rise to reverberations that are held in common by large groups of people. Each society has its own history and norms, economic and political system, its myths, heroes, sagas and TV commercials; all societies attach their own particular sense to institutions like 'marriage', 'work', 'leisure', or to objects like 'cars', 'houses' or 'guns'. By invoking the reverberations we share, we can understand each other; and conversely, when communicating with people who do not fully share our system of reverberations, we often fail to get our points across.

Collectively shared systems of reverberations explain how metaphors make sense. What we do when we appropriate something metaphorically – and what we do when we interpret a metaphor – is to make two systems of reverberations interact. Following Max Black, we could say that metaphors have a 'focus' – or a principal subject – and a 'frame' – or a secondary subject.<sup>11</sup> We understand the metaphor when we see the meanings of the focus *through* the meanings belonging to the frame. Or more precisely: among the many possible reverberations of the principal subject, those are chosen which the secondary subject highlights. A metaphor, Paul Ricoeur concurs,

tient ensemble dans une signification simple deux parties manquantes différentes des contextes différentes de cette signification. Il ne s'agit donc plus d'un simple déplacement des mots, mais d'un commerce entre pensées, c'est-à-dire d'une transaction entre contextes.<sup>12</sup>

Using a metaphor, says Nelson Goodman, is a question of

applying an old label in a new way . . . it is a matter of teaching an old word new tricks . . . metaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting.<sup>13</sup>

To take an example of this process at work, consider a hackneyed expression like 'man is a wolf'. What we need to know in order to understand this metaphor has nothing to do with the standard dictionary meaning of 'wolf' – men, generally, do not have four legs and grey shaggy fur. Instead we need access to everything which in our society is regarded as knowledge pertaining to wolves: everything we have ever heard or read about them, in scientific reports, films, or in the bedtime stories we were told as children. From the expert's standpoint much of this information will be half-truths or plain mistakes, but the important thing for the metaphor to be effective is not that the reverberations are true, but rather that they are sufficiently well known in order to be relied on in communication. By evoking this system of reverberations, we see man preying upon other animals, we see him as a fierce and hungry beast engaged in constant struggle.<sup>14</sup>

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this discussion and I will return to some of them in our subsequent discussion. For now, however, let us simply note how a study of metaphor may provide us with a tool for cross-cultural – and cross-temporal – analysis.<sup>15</sup>

Since meaning is made with the help of metaphor, a study of the metaphors that people invoke will necessarily be a study of how people make sense of the worlds in which they live.<sup>16</sup> As outside observers we may naturally have problems understanding many of these metaphorical expressions, yet there is no reason why we could not learn to translate them. The experiences and memories that people share are *facts* about a society, and like other facts about it they are amenable to investigation. We may never become perfect translators, to be sure, but our translations may be better or worse depending on the extent to which we in fact manage to make sense of what people say and do. Perhaps we could imagine gathering all the reverberations which a certain society attaches to its words, and in this way to compile enormous lists of all possible metaphors and all their potential uses. Such lists would constitute a dictionary which tells us, not what things 'are', but instead what things *may mean* to a certain set of people in a certain time and place.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps we could talk about the total collection of all such meanings as the 'culture' of a particular society.

### Narratives and actions

We make sense of things by seeing them in terms of other things, I said; we construct meaning with the help of metaphor. Yet metaphors are inherently deficient in one crucial respect: they picture only a condition or a state of affairs and tell us what something is like only at a given moment in time.

Yet our lives are not static, but continuous; we act and exist not only in, but also *over*, time. In order to make sense of this continuity, metaphors must be given a temporal dimension; the many single-frame pictures that metaphors supply must be assembled and connected to each other before they can run parallel to the continuing *movie* that is our lives. To assemble metaphors into sequences and to organise the continuity of life around them is to render an interpretation into *narrative form*, to tell a *story* about the metaphors we have come to embrace.<sup>18</sup>

The transition from metaphor to narrative is generally both smooth and immediate. We begin by seeing something *as some-thing* and then we simply start talking about it – first this happened, we say, then this, this, and then that. A peculiar feature of metaphor can account for this comfortable transition: a metaphor never comes alone, but is always related to other metaphors, and each metaphor finds its place only in a hierarchically ordered system. There are ‘root metaphors’ and there are metaphorical ‘branches’ that can be deduced from the roots.<sup>19</sup> In our everyday conversations we may perhaps only pay attention to the branches, but since all ways of talking presuppose a prior metaphorical commitment, we always have the option of following the branches back to the root. If we do this we will – perhaps to our surprise – find that even our most casual remarks are organised around a particular vision of things.<sup>20</sup> If we, for example, see the ruler of our country as the ‘head’ of our state, we can follow this metaphor backwards and note that it presupposes a root metaphor such as ‘the state is a body’. A claim that someone’s theory is ‘well founded’, ‘solid’, or ‘too rigid’, will reveal a metaphor such as ‘theories are buildings’. Similarly if we believe that our relationship is ‘going well’, that ‘we’re stuck’, that ‘we’ve hit a dead-end street’ or that ‘we’re at a cross-road’, we will rely on a root metaphor such as ‘love is a journey’. By committing ourselves to a particular vision of things, we obtain a whole vocabulary for talking about those things. The system of inter-related metaphors which we tacitly rely on can be explored and expanded for our ever-changing purposes and easily turned into stories through which the dynamic aspects of our lives can be grasped.

The most characteristic feature of narrative is the plot. The plot gives direction to the story; it provides our account with a beginning, a middle and an end. By joining earlier events to later ones, the plot keeps the story together and gives integrity and coherence to the people who participate in it.<sup>21</sup> Plots are generally organised around one or a couple of metaphors which tell us what the main characters are like, on what terms they are interacting and what kinds of situations they are facing.<sup>22</sup> The plot has a *problématique*, as it were, a fundamental tension or conflict. This tension is typically based on



the scarcity of some important resource – either talent, time, knowledge or money. The main character wants to do something, but she lacks a crucial piece of information, her time is running out, she is too poor or too short-sighted. This tension requires release, and release can only come as the *problématique* is worked through in the course of narrative time; the tension requires changes and readjustments, it requires *actions* on the part of *actors*. It is the *actions* of the good king or the evil step-mother that take us, step by step, through the fairy-tale; and analogously, what the Roman Republic, the French clergy, or the rebelling peasants *did* which organises the historian's account.<sup>23</sup>

To understand a story is consequently to follow the 'directedness' of the successive actions which the characters in the story undertake. We locate a beginning – a 'once upon a time' – and from this point the story pulls us forward as we respond to it with expectations regarding its completion. In this way the end of the story becomes a precondition for the existence of the story in the first place; without our pre-emption of this end there would be nothing for the story-teller to tell and nothing for the listeners to understand. We listen, attentively, since we want to know what will happen; and conversely, once the tension of the plot has been worked through, the story naturally comes to a halt. A properly constructed novel ends at the point when there are no longer any interesting options available to the characters it contains.<sup>24</sup> The prince and the princess lived, as it were, 'happily ever after'.<sup>25</sup>

From the perspective of the story's participants, the directedness of narrative can be understood in terms of the *intentional* aspect of action. To be a conscious human being is to have intentions and plans – to be trying to bring about certain effects – and the link between intention and execution is always rendered in narrative form.<sup>26</sup> In this way story-telling becomes a prerequisite of action: first we attach metaphors to our unfathomable selves, to the situations we are in, and then we go on telling stories about ourselves and our situations thus understood.<sup>27</sup> We tell ourselves what kind of a person we were/are/will be; what kind of a situation we were/are/will be in; and what such people as ourselves are likely to do under these particular circumstances.

In this way, and in this way only, can we come to formulate notions of interests. Since no actions can make sense except in the context of a narrative, there can be no interests outside of stories; only as that character which appears in the stories that we tell about ourselves can we have, or not have, an interest in doing one thing rather than another. 'As this kind of a person, I have an interest in this kind of a thing'; 'in the context of this particular plot this particular action will provide me with these benefit'.<sup>28</sup>

Once we tell ourselves a story of this kind the connection between interests and actions is also rendered explicit: a good story 'activates' the interests that we have and makes them 'come alive'; the story tells us what we must do to release the tension of the plot. If we only accept the context of the narrative, and tell the story to ourselves, then, when and if the occasion arises, we have a compelling reason to act.<sup>29</sup>

As we should not forget, however, this form of causality is of a curiously loose and equivocal kind. Knowing what metaphors a person embraces, we still know very little regarding which actions the person will perform. This must be so since metaphors generally are poly-semantic and since they can often be extended in radically new and unexpected directions. Even people who live in societies where there are only a limited number of accepted ways of looking at things can always explore the reverberations of these accepted meanings and discover new – perhaps contradictory – ways of understanding the world.<sup>30</sup> Metaphors can also often be 'mixed' – things can simultaneously be seen in a multitude of different ways and our interpretations can be assembled quite differently in different stories.<sup>31</sup>

Still narrative causation is *not* a random process. All metaphors and all stories are not available to us at each and every moment. We can only make sense of the world with the help of the interpretative resources made available to us by our societies, and these resources will necessarily display some measure of cohesion and connectedness. As societies, and as persons, we create 'poetic universes' and 'imaginary worlds' of relative coherence and stability.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, even though we are often able to mix our metaphors when describing a certain object or a state of affairs, there is a limit beyond which any further mixing creates confusion, not enlightenment. Things can be seen in many ways at different times, in different ways at all times, but not in all ways at the same time.

This discussion allows us to take sides in a debate which has kept contemporary scholars busy: what is an 'actor' and in what sense does an actor 'exist'? As many modern, rationalistically inclined, authors have argued, only individual human beings may properly be included in this category since only individual human beings can properly be said to 'act'. And as a consequence, the deliberations and the actions of collective entities – states, for example – must always be broken down into the deliberations and actions undertaken on the part of the individual human beings that constitute these collectives.<sup>33</sup>

According to a narrative theory of action, however, there is no need to discuss these issues in terms of ontological commitments: we need not try to determine which kinds of actors 'really exist' and which kinds do not. It

is simply not possible to say what an actor would be 'in him-, her- or itself', since he, she or it can only come to exist as acting, as preparing to act, or as just having acted. An actor is not what a person or a group 'really is' since actors exist only in the narratives they tell about themselves or that are told about them. *Actors exist in stories and nowhere else*, and stories are governed by narratological, not ontological, requirements. There is consequently no reason why collective entities of various kinds could not be admitted to this status, and there is furthermore no reason why collective entities could not be conceived of as having both intentions and interests. States too can be intentional, interest-driven, actors, we may conclude, provided that we tell stories which identify them as such.

### Narrative selves

This last conclusion paves the way for a more general argument concerning the ontological status of the modern subject. As I argued above, all attempts to provide the concept of interests with an independent definition will inevitably come to fall back on a consideration of who that someone is to whom the interests are said to belong. Yet, as we saw, no satisfactory answers can be found to this question within the parameters set by the modern orthodoxy. Both atomists and empiricists were looking for a 'true self' – a someone who is what we 'really are' – yet the only selves they could come up with were artefacts of their own ontological commitments. For atomists who took transcendental entities to exist, it was easy to put the self also on this ontological footing; for empiricists who did not take transcendental entities to exist, there could be no real self. Either way, however, the self vanished.

The way out of this dilemma is to stop asking questions about that which 'really does', or 'really does not', exist; as long as we look for 'real selves' we will not be able to find them. As our discussion of metaphors made clear, all questions regarding 'being' are really questions regarding 'being as'. We can never come up with a conclusive answer to the question of what we – or anyone else for that matter – 'really are', but this does not for a moment stop us talking about what we or others *are like*.<sup>34</sup> What we take ourselves to be is not a question of what essences constitute us, but instead a question of what metaphors we apply to ourselves. It is a question of how we see ourselves and of the stories we tell about what we see. 'Un homme', as Jean-Paul Sartre put it,

c'est toujours un conteur d'histoires, il vit entouré de ses histoires et des histoires d'autrui, il voit tout de ce qui lui arrive à travers elles; et il cherche à vivre sa vie comme s'il la racontait.<sup>35</sup>

'The actions and sufferings of life', David Carr concurs, 'can be viewed as a process of telling ourselves stories, listening to those stories, and acting them out or living them through'.<sup>36</sup> 'Man', according to Alasdair MacIntyre, 'is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal'.<sup>37</sup> 'Le personnage', in Paul Ricoeur's pithy formulation, 'est lui-même mis en intrigue'.<sup>38</sup> Following these authors and many others, we can replace the rationalistic, essentialist, concept with a *narrative* concept of the person.<sup>39</sup>

Above we talked about how 'actors' come to exist through the stories they tell or that are told about them; we now see that what goes for our selves as actors goes for our selves *tout court*. The stories we tell define not only what we want, but also who or what *we are like*. Yet there is an important difference between these two kinds of stories: the narratives through which our selves are constituted are always the more fundamental; stories of selves are preconditions for stories told about interests. It is only *as someone* that we can have an interest *in something*.

As constitutive of our being these narratives – we could call them 'constitutive stories' – create a presence for our selves in space and in time. In order to *be* we must be in the 'here' and the 'now' since only the here and the now constitute the class of things that are taken to *be* as opposed to the classes of things that once *were* or those that one day *will be*. Yet the 'here and now' is a surprisingly fragile notion. Strictly speaking the present moment does not exist, or is at best only an infinitesimal point in time which disappears before we come around to paying much attention to it. Paradoxically each moment exists only as anticipated or as remembered, but never really as 'present'. The same thing is true also for that which is present in space. Distance is not a natural, geometrical, notion, but is instead always at the mercy of an anthropocentric and experiential definition. A thing is far away or close depending, not on some absolute measurement, but instead on where we are ourselves; a presence is always a 'here for me'.

As a result, neither the temporal nor the spatial present is a natural, hospitable, location which simply is 'there' for us to inhabit. What we must do is instead to *create* a present for our selves; we must *make room* for our selves in time and in space. This is the task which a constitutive story fulfils by extending our being in space and in time. It is with the construction of a constitutive story that our selves come to exist, and it is with the destruction of a constitutive story that our selves disappear.

To create a presence for our selves in time, first of all, is to locate our selves in the context of a past and a future.<sup>40</sup> The story we tell carves out a 'now' as a moment in narrative time and we are able to talk about the

'present hour', the 'present year' or the 'present generation', since it is an hour, a year, or a generation which has been preceded by others and after which others will follow. We can *be* someone today since we *were* someone yesterday and since we *will* be someone tomorrow. But the story not only creates a present; it also makes sense of it by inserting it into the plot which is our individual or collective lives. Our present has meaning since it relates to a beginning, to an end, and to the different sections or scenes into which the plot is divided.

For someone who is engaged in the task of formulating a new identity, or for someone who feels increasingly uncomfortable with an old identity, the identification of beginnings, ends, sections and scenes is likely to be a task of paramount importance. We characteristically begin the telling by locating an origin in time. As individuals we may do this by retracing the genealogies of our families or by recalling the formative moments of our childhood or youth. As societies we may describe the founding of the nation through the glorious acts of a hero king ('the founding fathers') or perhaps by retracing our origin to the relations obtaining in a pre-social, pre-political, condition ('the state of nature'). From this beginning the story develops chapter by chapter. As individuals we divide our lives into the places where we have lived, the boy- or girlfriends we have had, the schools we have attended or the jobs we have held. As societies we make the same divisions as we identify important historical turning-points such as wars ('the *ante-bellum* South', 'the post-Cold War era') or major discoveries and inventions ('pre-Columbian America', 'the computer age'). Similarly we project our stories into the future as we try to envision their continuation and their end. As individuals we dream dreams of a better, more comfortable, life ahead; as societies we look to the future and to all the progress, development and prosperity it will bring.

But, as we said, to create a presence for our selves is also to create a presence in space. In order to exist we must exist not only 'now' but also 'here'; we must insert our being into a location which is distinct from all other possible locations. In abstract, empty, limitless, space there can be no notion of presence since every point is just as close or just as far away as every other.<sup>41</sup> That which is not naturally there, however, we readily create; we *make* a presence for our selves by anthropomorphising and humanising the abstract, empty and limitless. Or to use Yi-Fu Tuan's felicitous formulation, we 'turn space into place'.<sup>42</sup>

In order to anthropomorphise space we characteristically compare the abstract void to the concrete and the readily graspable. Often this is done by reference to the human body: by measuring space with the help of our bodily faculties, emptiness is filled with landmarks; there is a certain area

that we can cover with our vision, another area that we can cover on foot; there is a place where we can watch the sun rise and set.<sup>43</sup> In this way we also draw distinctions between 'here' and 'there', 'close' and 'far', and since all notions of closeness and remoteness denote not only spatial distance but also accessibility and concern, our selves will naturally come to be located in what we perhaps could call a 'geography of affection'. We draw distinctions between those people that are close to us and those that are further away; between 'us' and 'them', between 'friends' and 'enemies'; we make 'insides' and 'outsides' by drawing lines between those places where we are 'at home' and those places where we are 'foreigners'.<sup>44</sup>

Through the narratives that we tell about this affective geography, space is imbued with meaning and fused with time. In this way places become *our* places, places to which we feel allegiance and loyalty.<sup>45</sup> We may, for example, turn to the past and tell the story of some ancient hero who fell in some ancient battle, or more simply of the members of our family who lived, worked and died here before us. Similarly we may turn to the future and tell the story of how we plan to continue to exist in this place: a narrative about the extension we are going to make to our house, or of the communal project for a new road, dam or airport.

With the help of our constitutive stories, it is important to note, we are not only carving out a presence for our selves in time and in space, but also making a claim to legitimacy. Meaning, we like to believe, has value *as such*, and what we have made sense of we generally feel to be both valid and true. In this way a constitutive story confers not only meaning upon a subject, but also rights – since we have come to exist we believe we have a right to existence. By, for example, telling the story of how the past came to produce the present, an individual or a group is able to back up his, her or its claim on power.<sup>46</sup> Alternatively, if we for some reason cannot come up with much of a past, we can use the future for the same purpose. The end of the story we tell – the point at which all the tension of the plot is released – will show that the choices, actions and sacrifices of the present were justified. 'Future generations', 'posterity', or perhaps 'God at the Day of Judgement' will thank us, prove us right or count us among the select few.<sup>47</sup>

### Narratives and audiences

The narrative analysis of actions and identities which I have presented is radically incomplete in two crucial respects: it is too arbitrary and too individualistic. The process of story-telling appears to be little more than a leisurely pastime governed by whatever limits there are to our individual imagination. This picture is false. The telling of a story is not arbitrary, not



a pastime, and it is not something anyone does alone. In fact, there are strict limits both to the courses of action open to us and to the kinds of identities we can construct. We can neither do whatever we want to do, nor be whatever we want to be. What we can do, and can be, is instead ultimately determined by the reactions of the audiences to whom our stories are addressed.

Another way to put this point is to stress that meaning cannot be created by one individual in isolation from all others; just as there cannot be such a thing as a private language, meanings cannot exist only in the privacy of one person's mind.<sup>48</sup> Whatever senses we make we make in communication with other people, and the stories we tell are always addressed to a someone or a something. When we are, say, talking to a friend or writing a letter, the presence of this audience is obvious, but we are often also presenting our narratives to audiences of a more imaginary kind: we envision a listener and address our words to him, her or it. If nothing else we talk to ourselves regarding ourselves – we are simultaneously our own speaker and our own audience.<sup>49</sup> In general, however, we address more than one audience at one and the same time. We make up a story, and in our minds we try it out on our friends and lovers, parents, sisters, children and so on in ever-widening circles of acquaintances, accomplices, supporters and detractors. Special audiences are those addressed in capitalised terms: God, History, Future Generations, the Fatherland, the Cause.

Depending on which audience we address we usually package our message in somewhat different terms. Human beings constantly seek support and acceptance from people around them and they typically try to persuade different people in different ways. To say that we alter our message depending on the audience we address is not, however, necessarily to say that we are hypocrites. Metaphors are poly-semic, as we pointed out above, and they can be expanded into a number of different narratives. Thus we can often remain committed to one and the same metaphor while telling slightly different – perhaps even contradictory – stories about it. We can always see ourselves in a multitude of ways, and depending on the context and the circumstances, we may prefer one picture as more appealing than another.

Since all stories require audiences, it follows that we cannot formulate notions of interests in isolation from other people – we simply cannot want things alone.<sup>50</sup> What we want we can only want as that character which appears in a story we tell about ourselves and which we address to an audience. As a result, another way of putting the same point is to say that interests never can be thought of as 'properties' of individual human beings,

that is, as things that people 'have'. If anything interests are properties of communication *between* individuals; things that people construct as they seek to explain themselves to themselves as well as to others.<sup>51</sup>

Conceived of in this fashion interests are put on an entirely different footing from that suggested by the proponents of the modern orthodoxy. As we saw above, the rationality requirement implies that there is one and only one person behind each action, or, as the case may be, one and only one group. This one person or group is to be equated with a power of reflection which is removed from the coincidental flux of things and the momentary passions which this flux elicits. As equated with a transcendental power of reflection, each person is able to rank his or her preferences consistently over time and consistently between contexts. Yet, an actor who exists only in the stories told about him, her or it, can have no such unquestionable ontological status since the stories in question are likely to differ depending on the audience to whom they are addressed. Since the actor has no transcendental existence 'behind' or 'beyond' these stories there can be no 'core-self' which assures that interests will be stable, coherent and compatible over time or between contexts.<sup>52</sup> Inter-temporal and inter-contextual consistency cannot be guaranteed by any transcendental – extra-narratological – power of reflection. As a result we can never expect more than a loosely integrated acting self.

A very similar conclusion can be drawn concerning constitutive stories. As persons we do not simply 'exist', we said, but we *come to exist* through stories which create a presence for our selves in time and in space. Constitutive stories too require audiences, however, and just as we cannot want some-*thing* alone, we cannot be some-*one* except before others. Analogously, just as interests are features of the communication between human beings and not private possessions, an identity is a feature of social interaction and not something which a particular individual 'has'.

For an individual or group which is trying to establish a new identity, this dependence on others is likely to appear as an infringement on a fundamental right to self-description. To make something meaningful, we said above, is to create something which has an intrinsic value, and since we feel that that which is valuable should also be protected, we may come to believe we have a unilateral right to decide who we are. Yet no such right to self-description can be guaranteed. Which stories we can tell and what persons we can become is not given by the limits of our imagination, but depends instead ultimately on the *validity* of the descriptions we come up with.

In order to find out whether a particular constitutive story is a valid description of us, it must first be tested in interaction with others. In principle we could perhaps imagine these tests carried out by each individual

alone, yet if matters of verification and falsification were entirely up to us we would hardly be able to resist a temptation to cheat. Furthermore, human beings are not very good observers of themselves. We live our lives, but we never *see* ourselves living them, and as a consequence we are never in a position to see how well or how badly a particular description fits. In order to make these judgements, we need to look at ourselves from an *external* point of view; that is, we need the judgement of others. We receive these judgements as we submit our stories of our selves for the consideration of the audiences we address; the stories are tested as we ask our audiences to tell us whether the self-descriptions they contain are indeed valid descriptions of who we take ourselves to be. In other words: we ask our audiences to *recognise us* as the kinds of persons that our stories identify. Only if they affirm the validity of the description have we survived the test; *only as recognised can we conclusively come to establish a certain identity*.<sup>53</sup> In this way all stories that we tell about our selves will come to make tacit demands on their listeners: 'this is what I am like!', 'recognise me under this description!'

Yet constitutive stories also are addressed to many different audiences and not all of them are likely to matter to the same degree. If our test is to be decisive, we are particularly interested in the reactions of the people whose judgements we trust the most. We need to be respected, not just by anybody, but above all by those people we in turn respect; we want recognition from the people we recognise.<sup>54</sup> This means that ultimately only those people have the power to bestow a certain identity upon us who themselves already are what we would like to become. Perhaps we could call these audiences 'circles of recognition'.<sup>55</sup>

What will happen, then, if our right to self-description is denied us? What are we going to do if we cannot establish our selves as those particular kinds of selves that our stories describe? Or, to address the question of evidence: how do we know whether recognition is granted or not?

The answer to the last of these questions will obviously differ depending on whether we are exposed to the recognition failure ourselves or whether it is something which we study as outside observers. We know when we are not being recognised because not being recognised *hurts*; it is easy to identify slights, insults and humiliations when we experience them ourselves. For an outside observer, however, recognition failures are never as obvious. This is especially the case if the humiliated person simply accepts the treatment, swallows the insult and goes on.<sup>56</sup> In this respect, what we could call a 'crime against an identity' is very different from what we could call a 'crime against an interest'. If someone's interests are violated, that someone will still be around to seek redress; most probably he or she will make a lot

of noise about the injuries suffered and the utilities lost. A crime against an identity, however, is an act of omission rather than commission. If we want to deny a person recognition, all we have to do is to look the other way – no big gestures are needed and few traces are left at the sight of the crime. In fact, when someone's identity is violated it is often not even clear who the claimant is. The fundamental difficulty here is whether the loss should be measured by the standards of that someone we *would have* become if only recognition had been granted, or by the standards of someone else. The difficulty with the first alternative is that that someone who we would have become, we did not become, and the difficulty with the second alternative is that the injury we have suffered might not be regarded as such in terms of whatever old identity we can fall back on. More succinctly put: a crime against an identity cannot be measured in terms of a loss of utilities since the crime makes it impossible to establish a relevant standard by which utilities can be measured.

Yet some kind of a description is always necessary since we simply cannot *be* without being described; we must settle on one story or another or we will soon – much like a character in a Dostoyevski novel – start to lose our grip on reality. The question is only which story will finally be accepted. Somewhat schematically we could perhaps imagine three possible courses of action open to us here. The first option we have already discussed: to accept the descriptions that others apply to us, to internalise them and to make them ours. Perhaps those others – our potential peers, colleagues or friends – were right about us after all, perhaps we overestimated our worth, our skills or our looks. The second option is to rethink our descriptions of our selves and come up with a new story that better corresponds to the facts as they have been revealed. Yet this too would probably mean defeat since our new stories, most likely, would have to be modelled on what we already know people around us to accept. The third option, however, is to stand by our original story and to try to convince our audiences that it in fact does apply to us. Thus while the first two options mean that we accept the definitions forced upon us by others, the third option means that we force our own definition upon someone else.

There are of course many ways in which to convince people that they are wrong about us. We may try to plead with them perhaps, yet mere words are probably not going to get us very far. What we typically do instead is *to act*; only through *action* can we provide the kind of final, decisive, evidence that *proves* the others wrong. The action will be there for everyone to see and as such it will be an irrefutable manifestation of our character; our action will encroach upon our detractors and force them to reconsider their views. 'People cannot act without an identity', as Alessandro Pizzorno puts

it, 'when nobody questions the one they have received, they use it; when this is threatened or worn out, without even being aware of it, they fight for one'.<sup>57</sup> We act in order to seek justice, redress or revenge.<sup>58</sup>

Actions undertaken in defence of an identity are of a peculiar kind. They are certainly undertaken *for reasons* – we have reasons to do what we do – yet they are not actions which can be said to be undertaken 'in our interest'. 'Interests' can only be *someone's* interests and the establishing of this 'someone' is of course precisely what the action in question is designed to accomplish. The action does not seek to maximise utility or minimise loss, but instead to establish a standard – a self – by which utilities and losses can be measured. These are consequently not 'rational actions', but instead actions undertaken in order to make rational actions possible. We act, as it were, in 'self defence' in the most basic sense of the word – in defence of the applicability of our descriptions of our selves.<sup>59</sup> Since these non-rational, non-interest-driven, actions constitute an alternative class, a theory which explains them must be an alternative, non-rational and non-interest-driven, theory of action.

### Establishing new identities

Yet if there indeed is such an alternative class of actions, why has this so rarely been acknowledged? Why have modern scholars characteristically been oblivious to the fact that people act not only in defence of their interests, but also in defence of their identities? The best explanation is no doubt that identities have been taken for granted since they generally *can be* taken for granted. That is, questions regarding identities are not always at stake, but are only raised at certain – rather unique – periods in the life of an individual or a society. In what we could call 'normal times' identities are simply 'there' to be used and relied on rather than analysed and worried about. Yet not all times are normal ones and there are also moments when questions of identities suddenly come to the fore. Moments when old identities break down and new ones are created in their place; times when new stories are being told, submitted to audiences, and new demands for recognition presented. Perhaps we could call such times 'formative moments'.

As a way to make sense of the rapid and often chaotic developments which characterise a formative moment, let us recall a point I made in our discussion of metaphors. Metaphors describe things in terms appropriate to other things, we said; we make sense of something by seeing it *as something*. To see something *as something*, however, necessarily means *not* to see something as some other thing; by describing a thing in one set of terms, we are also *not* describing it in another set of terms. This means that while



the vocabulary which we settle upon will catch some aspects and features of the world, it will not catch all aspects and features, and there will consequently always be aspects and features that cannot be observed from our particular point of view.<sup>60</sup> Or put somewhat differently: as we explore the system of reverberations of a particular metaphor we will sooner or later run up against a limit, and if we try to go beyond this limit the metaphor will break down and simply stop making sense.<sup>61</sup> This is the point beyond which good poetry turns into bad and political and social discourses become unintelligible.

Just as there are limits to the applicability of a metaphor, metaphors will also be applied differently at different moments in time. Metaphors, like everything else, go through life cycles – they are born, they mature and they die. A new metaphor is sometimes strange, sometimes outrageous or difficult to interpret, but to the extent that it is successful it will also show us new things. The new metaphor will help us point to new connections between things, events and phenomena, and identify new possibilities that need to be explored.<sup>62</sup> As an increasing number of people start to take the new vision for granted and to act upon it in their daily lives, however, the metaphor becomes increasingly embedded in social practices and institutions. A young metaphor, we could say, gives us a fresh vision of the world painted in vivid colours, but as the metaphor grows older the colours inevitably start to fade. Eventually the metaphor paints its picture in grey on grey, and it no longer has anything more to show us. The metaphor ‘dies’, as it were, and moves into our dictionaries as a standard definition of the concept concerned.<sup>63</sup> Socially, we could talk about the same process as ‘entrenchment’: as a metaphor is increasingly taken for granted it will become entrenched in social institutions and reflected in people’s unreflective, everyday, actions. As the metaphor is entrenched, so is a certain social order and a certain power structure.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that metaphors give but a limited perspective on the world, and the fact that metaphors become increasingly naturalised over time, mean that all taken-for-granted interpretations will sooner or later be undermined and replaced by others. Since there is no point of view from which everything can be seen, and since we always have to settle for one perspective – or a limited number of perspectives – at the expense of all others, there will always be perspectives which we ignore. There is, in other words, always a difference between the total number of interpretations which could be constructed and the subset of interpretations which we embrace. Hence there will always be unacknowledged facts to discover, and there will be more such facts the more thoroughly entrenched a particular metaphor is.

This discrepancy between the ‘actual’ and the ‘potential’ opens up a



space of cultural and political opportunities that can be seized upon by any individual or group that is able to present an alternative vision of the world. To the extent that this alternative vision is accepted, the taken-for-granted vision will be undermined and public confidence in political leaders and social institutions that depend upon it will weaken correspondingly. The result is a 'formative moment': a time when the very definition of the meaningful is up for grabs; when old metaphors are replaced by new ones; when new stories are told about these metaphors, new identities established and new social practices initiated.<sup>65</sup>

However, since the applicability and value of a new interpretation rarely is self-evident, meanings do not replace each other according to some pre-established rules of succession. Instead formative moments are periods when meanings are *contested* and fought over with the help of all sorts of rhetoric and propaganda. In these rhetorical battles, traditional power-holders will characteristically try to reaffirm, or reinterpret, the old meanings which have kept them in power, while challengers most probably will try to recode the established symbols to suit their purposes. New, alternative, metaphors will also be launched and their systems of reverberations worked through and subjected to public scrutiny. In the process, new channels of communication are likely to be developed and established ones discredited. Formative moments, we could say, are characteristically periods of symbolic hyper-inflation – times when new emblems, flags, dress codes, songs, *fêtes* and rituals are continuously invented.<sup>66</sup>

There are, we should note, good reasons why formative moments will come to develop this rhetorical quality. When a speaker presents a new metaphor it is usually not clear to the audience whether it is going to do a better job than any of its already accepted alternatives. Before we know that a new interpretation indeed represents an improvement on an old one, we need to know more about it. The reverberations of the new metaphor must first be investigated and its potentials worked through; we must apply the new metaphor in our daily lives and explore its implications. If we manage to do this, we should – but only *in retrospect* – be able to say whether the new interpretation is better or worse, whether it has added new and exciting dimensions to our worn-down experiences, or whether it has subtracted too much from what was familiar and reliable.<sup>67</sup> It follows that a full evaluation of a new metaphor can only take place *after* the metaphor itself has been accepted, at least in a tentative version. It follows also, as a point of logic, that if the full gamut of meanings that lend credibility to a new vision are produced only as a consequence of us first adopting the vision in question, then these meanings can play no role in choosing which vision to adopt. Thus since people cannot yet be convinced by the full force of

reason, they must be convinced by some other means. We must be seduced by 'irrational means such as propaganda, emotion, *ad hoc* hypotheses, and appeal to prejudices' into adopting a particular view which we can only later go on to explore and to justify rationally.<sup>68</sup>

Since formative moments are times when new meanings become available, they are also times when new identities can be made and established. New metaphors allow us to see ourselves in new ways, to tell new stories about what we see, and to demand recognition for the characters that appear in these stories. For this reason formative moments often come to appear as times of unprecedented poetic freedom: people suddenly believe they can fashion themselves according to their own fancy and become whatever they want to be. Yet formative moments are equally also – and indeed for the same reason – times of conformism and rule-following. In order to understand this paradoxical feature we should consider the problem of recognition from the point of view of the members of the audience to whom a new story is addressed. Obviously, it is often very difficult for such a listener to judge the claims that are being made by a speaker. Often we simply do not know how to respond to the demands that are presented to us; we do not know whether to recognise a person under a certain description. In order to simplify these judgements a rule of some kind is very helpful. The rule sets a standard by which an action can be judged and assessed and thereby also a standard through which conclusions can be drawn regarding the person who performed it. The rule will not only differentiate the kind of behaviour that is considered 'wrong' from the kind of behaviour that is considered 'right', but also – and more importantly perhaps from our perspective – identify the class of actors to whom the rule itself applies. In this way the rule can be relied on to determine who belongs to a certain group and who does not.

Given the way in which rules are used not only for the classification of actions, but also for the classification of the people who perform them, formative moments will characteristically be times when of all sorts of social codes are invented. Whenever people have difficulties telling who they are interacting with, rules are quickly established which can settle the matter. For someone who aspires to be recognised by others it is of course crucial to learn how to play by these rules. We must show those who are already well established and universally recognised that they have reasons to count us as one of their kind.<sup>69</sup> Social upstarts are likely to be very good rule-followers, not primarily because they fear punishment in accordance with the rule if they fail, but because they want to be identified as members of the group where a particular rule applies.

For purposes of identification and recognition, all forms of displays and manifestations are also crucial. We must present visible signs that we indeed are persons of a particular kind; it is only if other people see us in a certain way that they are able to draw conclusions regarding our character. By facilitating identification, display also makes it possible to draw the boundary between those who belong to a certain group and those who do not. For this reason we all tend to participate in rituals in which we are easily recognised in a certain capacity. We belong together if we simultaneously perform the same acts or utter the same words, *and* if we are aware that others are doing the same together with us.<sup>70</sup>

### A narrative theory of action

The narrative theory which I have developed in this chapter allows us to fill in some of the blanks which the modern orthodoxy left open. As we saw, modern scholars of very different persuasions are wont to explain actions by reference to the interests of the person or group who brought the action about. People 'act in their interests' – they do what they do because they take it to be in their interests to do it. Yet, as we saw, modern scholars have embarrassingly little to say regarding what this in fact might mean. It is not clear what 'interests' are or how they are formed, and every attempt to come up with a definition of the concept will inevitably become hostage to a definition of the self to whom the interests in question are said to belong. Once we turned to a discussion of this issue, however, we were again disappointed since the concept of the person embraced by orthodox scholars effectively removed the self from the scope of any investigation. It is highly unclear how such an ever-vanishing self can be said to act, we said, and as a result the causal connection between interests and actions also was rendered highly tenuous.

Our heterodox reformulation took off from a discussion of how meaning is created. Only that which is meaningful to us can give us a reason for an action, we said, and meaning is made as metaphors are expanded into narratives. Although we never can say what a thing 'really is', we can still see this thing *as some-thing* and tell stories about it. We made an analytical distinction between two different kinds of stories: stories we tell about actions and stories we tell about our selves. In the stories we tell about actions we come to see our selves as particular kinds of characters who do and want particular kinds of things; in the stories we tell about our selves we come to exist as we create a presence for our selves in time and in space. The latter kind of narrative is the more fundamental and a precondition for the former. Still, as we stressed, which story we tell is in the final analysis not

up to each story-teller to decide. We cannot do whatever we want to do or be whatever we want to be since we constantly depend on the recognition that others grant. Only as described and as recognised under a certain description can we come to exist and only once we have come to exist can we develop a notion of interests.

We should stress, however, that a narrative theory of action offers a *reformulation* of the modern orthodoxy, not an outright rejection. Our theoretical focus is the broader one, and the insights of the modern orthodoxy can – if only properly revised – be incorporated under it. Hence we may readily agree that there are times when people can best be thought of as acting in a rational and utility-maximising manner. However, only as that character which appears in our stories about our selves can we have, or not have, an interest in doing one thing rather than another; neither actions nor interests can exist outside of the context of a narrative. Moreover, since these stories are likely to vary between different rhetorical settings, the way in which we define our interests will vary correspondingly. Hence interests can never refer to something that we ‘really’, or ‘objectively’, want, but only to what we may want our selves to want before a particular audience. As a result we can never expect there to be more than a loosely integrated acting self.

This way of conceiving of actors, interests and rationality forces us to reconsider some of the most cherished methodological beliefs embraced by social scientists and historians. As far as historians are concerned, we must question their assumption that primary source material can be arranged according to what we referred to above as a ‘private-to-public continuum’. The more private the source, the supposition went, the closer it will be to the ‘real’ person, and the more likely it is to provide us with ‘real’ reasons for an action. Yet if my argument is correct, and there is nothing ‘beyond’ or ‘behind’ the stories we tell, there can be no ‘real reasons’ hidden in private diaries or letters. The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves are only one kind of stories among many, and as such they have no privileged status. Some stories may of course be more important to us than others, but there is no reason why they should be told to diaries or to close friends. The central story about an actor could very well be written in the most public statements available.<sup>71</sup>

As far as social scientists are concerned, we must similarly reject their belief in the existence of a unified, coherent and transcendental self. There is no underlying ‘essence’ which guarantees our integrity and which makes it possible for us to rank our preferences consistently over time and between narrative contexts. The advantages of accepting this conclusion should be obvious: once the metaphysical belief in a unified actor is rejected, all the puzzles regarding weakness of will, *akrasia*, are immediately solved. Since

there is no underlying self we should not be surprised that people often act incoherently, and that people's views regarding themselves, their interests and their actions vary depending on the audience they address. In fact the rationalists' puzzles become our ordinary cases: what is puzzling to us is not inconsistency and incoherence, but their opposites.

Our focus on narrative can also help us establish the causal link we missed in our discussion above. A story is what connects the interests we passively contemplate in the back of our minds and the actions we perform in the world. A good story 'activates' the interests that we have and makes them 'come alive'. A well-chosen, striking, new metaphor is an *event* – something which happens in the world – and as such it can cause other events. In this way the stories we tell about the metaphor can stir us into action.<sup>72</sup> The story tells us what we must do to release the tension of the plot, and if we accept the narrative context – if we only tell it to ourselves; if we 'mind' it – then, when and if the occasion arises, we act.<sup>73</sup>

Yet while a narratological reformulation may solve a number of traditional puzzles it also poses new ones. For example: even if we accept that an actor acts in order to further the interest which a story defined, there will always be many different such stories addressed to many different audiences, and as outside observers we generally have no way of telling which story is the most important one. In order to make headway here we could perhaps imagine asking the person in question why he or she did a certain thing, but even if we were to receive a sincere answer to this question, this would be an answer addressed to *us* and as such it would never be anything more than one narrative construction among many. Even if a person tells 'the truth' about him- or herself, there are always other truths to be told.

In order to deal with this difficulty we must begin by gathering source material in as many places as we possibly can. In order to assess one particular story we must come to see it in the context of all other stories that a person tells about his or her action; we should collect *all* the reasons given for the action before *all* the audiences addressed. There is both a time dimension to this analysis and what we could call a 'communicative dimension' – we should gather the reasons as they varied from one moment to the next, but also as they varied from one audience to another. Only when suspended in this network of narrative interactions can we hope to begin to get a grasp on the totality of the acting self which the person in question sought to construct.

Yet a total collection of stories will as such tell us nothing regarding *the* cause of an action. If we insist on the necessity of singling out one particular reason as the most important, we must find a way of assessing the



various reasons we have gathered and of weighing them against each other. Once we have rejected the notion of a transcendental 'real self', however, it seems difficult to make any form of references to 'real reasons' behind an action. Yet even while acknowledging this point, we may nevertheless argue that some stories are more fundamental than others. A person might prefer him- or herself as one kind of actor rather than some other; there are, we could say, some stories which we cannot stop telling without ceasing to be the kinds of actors we take ourselves to be. And as our preceding discussion allows us to hypothesise, these stories are most probably those we tell to the most important among our audiences: those people whom we are particularly keen to impress and those whose recognition is particularly important to us.

As we pointed out, however, an explanation phrased in terms of interests can by itself never be enough. The stories we tell about our actions are always connected to the stories that we tell about our selves; what we want is a result of what we take our selves to be and what we take our selves to be is a result of the descriptions under which we can gain recognition. In this way the applicability of the interest-driven explanation will always come to be a function of the stability of the self to whom these interests are said to belong. As we saw, there are 'normal times' when identities can safely be taken for granted, but also 'formative moments' when new identities are in the process of being established. At these latter times people fight for their identities rather than for their interests, and although these latter actions also can be said to be undertaken 'for reasons', they are not the kinds of reasons that feed into a utility calculus since it is the very possibility of a utility calculus that the actions are designed to establish. When an identity is available, we use it; when an identity is not available, we do what it takes to establish one.

If there are times when actions are undertaken in defence of a self rather than in defence of an interest, the problem for an outside observer becomes how to identify such times. We need to know when to explain an action in one way rather than in another. As I pointed out above, however, what we called a 'crime against an identity' is a crime of omission rather than commission and as such it is often difficult both to observe and to document. Yet if we only look for it, we can hope to find enough circumstantial evidence to support an alternative interpretation. Perhaps we could imagine a checklist of requirements that needs to be fulfilled for an identity-driven explanation to be applicable instead of an interest-driven one:

- 1) Traditional explanations phrased in terms of interests should produce ambiguous, highly contested or perverse results. If there was no



obvious interest to be defended, or if the scholars who have studied the case are deeply divided regarding which interest the action was designed to further, then we have an *a priori* reason to be suspicious of these explanations.

- 2) The period in which the action took place should correspond to what we have called a 'formative moment'. It must be a time when new metaphors were launched, when individuals and groups told new stories about themselves, and when new sets of rules emerged through which identities were classified.
- 3) The particular person or group whose action we want to explain must be engaged in a process of identity creation. It must be someone who tells constitutive stories and tries to establish a presence in both time and space; someone who constructs an affective geography of friends and enemies; someone who pays careful attention to the rules of the social system to which he or she or it seeks to belong.
- 4) We must identify an occasion, or a series of occasions, on which recognition was denied under humiliating circumstances. We need to prove that our person or group suffered as a result and that the failure of recognition was indeed experienced as a loss of dignity, worth and 'face'.

If we can fulfil these requirements we are, I believe, justified in explaining the subsequent action undertaken by the person or the group as a defence of an identity rather than of an interest.

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## Historical and cultural preliminaries

Time now to return to our case study and explain why Sweden went to war in 1630. Our explanation will proceed in two steps. We will begin by investigating to what extent the decision to go to war may have been prompted by Sweden acting in defence of its national interest. We will look for the interests – religious, military, economic or other – which may have caused the country to intervene. Secondly we will ask to what extent the decision may have been prompted by Sweden acting in defence of its national identity. We will study how a Swedish identity was formed during the course of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries and investigate in what sense – and based on what evidence – the decision to go to war can be said to have been a result of this process of identity formation. As I shall try to make clear, it is only once this second step in our investigation is taken that we can conclusively explain the Swedish action.

Before we can turn to a direct study of the source material, however, we need some basic knowledge regarding the historical setting in which the intervention took place. We need to know more about the origin of the Swedish state and its development during the sixteenth century – in particular we need to grasp the dynamics of the dynastic struggles which took place within the royal family, the house of Vasa. Furthermore we need to understand the fundamentals of the conflict between Protestants and Catholics as it developed on the European continent during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Once this general background has been sketched, we should turn to an issue which is of particular concern within the context of the theoretical framework of our study. Our definitions of interests and identities are intimately related to the way in which we make sense of our world, we said; it is on the basis of the meanings we construct that interests and identities are defined. If this point is accepted, we must face the implication that meanings may be constructed differently in

different historical and social settings. We cannot simply assume that others make sense of the world in the same way as we do. In order to investigate this possibility we must find out more about meaning-making in the early seventeenth century. We need to know how intellectual and political discussions were carried out, how reasons were constructed and how people could be persuaded to do one thing rather than another.

### **The historical setting**

It is impossible to talk about a 'Sweden', understood as an independent political unit, prior to the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> During the Middle Ages the three Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Denmark and Norway had been united in one common political framework governed by one common ruler. This Nordic Union was a federation which in theory was supposed to have left a large measure of independence to local, feudal, lords, but which during the late Middle Ages increasingly came to be dominated by Denmark. After the execution of a group of rebellious Swedish noblemen in Stockholm in November 1520, relations between the Swedish aristocracy and the Danish rulers deteriorated rapidly. The 'blood bath of Stockholm', as the event was to be referred to in later Swedish propaganda, became a symbol of the tyrannical rule of the Danes who by this time were considered as little but a foreign occupying power. In January 1521, Gustav Vasa, a young Swedish nobleman who had seen his father killed in Stockholm, mobilised people in a revolt. The uprising spread quickly across the country and before the end of the year Vasa and his men had occupied all Swedish territory except the capital itself. Vasa was elected Chancellor in 1521, and king – under the name of Gustav I – in 1523. The same year, with naval support from the Hanseatic city of Lübeck, Stockholm surrendered to his troops.

Once in power, Gustav embarked upon a vigorous programme of administrative and financial reform. He organised the first embryonic central bureaucracy and improved state finances by expropriating the lands and property which belonged to the church. As one of the very first princes in Europe, Gustav Vasa even converted to the new, Protestant, religion launched by Martin Luther in Germany only a few years previously, and he soon sought to convince his subjects to follow his example. A Lutheran liturgy was introduced in the churches, Catholic monasteries were closed and all connections between Stockholm and the Holy See were severed. The new religion was organised as a *state church*, a *Swedish church*, which in theory was to have its own independent spiritual leadership, but which in reality was subordinated to the crown.

The administrative, financial and religious reorganisations were not popular in all camps, however, and several peasant rebellions broke out during the latter half of Gustav's reign. The largest such uprising began in the southern region of Småland in 1542 where well-organised peasant groups for a time seriously threatened the position of the king. Eventually, however, Gustav prevailed and wiped out all regional seats of power. The country was unified and centralised to a previously unprecedented extent; the king was sovereign over his people and from this time onward all political struggles were to focus on the control of the central executive apparatus. In 1544, Gustav convinced the Diet to abolish the previous elective monarchy and make the country a hereditary monarchy, the crown passing along to the male descendants of the Vasa line.

When Gustav Vasa died in 1560, he was succeeded by the oldest of his sons, Erik, who took the name of Erik XIV. In contrast to his father, Erik was very active in foreign affairs. When the German Order state (the Crusading Order of the Livonian Knights), which during the Middle Ages had controlled the eastern shores of the Baltic sea, began to disintegrate in the mid-sixteenth century, Erik sought to expand Swedish influence in that direction. In 1561, the city of Reval and the aristocracy of most of Estonia were forced to recognise the rule of the Swedish crown. When Erik continued southward to Livonia, however, the people here soon turned to the Polish king for their defence. As a consequence, war – the so-called Nordic Seven Year War – broke out in 1563 between Sweden, on the one side, and Poland, Denmark and Lübeck, on the other.

As far as domestic politics were concerned, Erik XIV was not as resourceful and not as skilled a statesman as his father. One particular problem concerned his relations to the nobility, most notably to the local lords who had been accustomed to a measure of independence during the days of the Nordic Union. In the late 1560s this confrontation came to a climax as two of Erik's brothers – Johan and Karl – joined the aristocracy in an open revolt. The coup-makers received support also from many peasants and merchants who had suffered during the war in the Baltic. Erik was jailed and dethroned by the Diet, and his brother Johan made king in his place.

Once in power, the new king – Johan III, as he was to be known – made peace with Denmark and Lübeck and soon also brought the war with Poland to a close. Johan took a strong personal interest in religious matters and all his life he sought ways to reconcile the Protestant and the Catholic faiths. He introduced a new syncretistic liturgy in the Swedish churches and missions and advisers from Rome once again made their appearance at the Stockholm court. Johan even married a Polish – and hence Catholic –

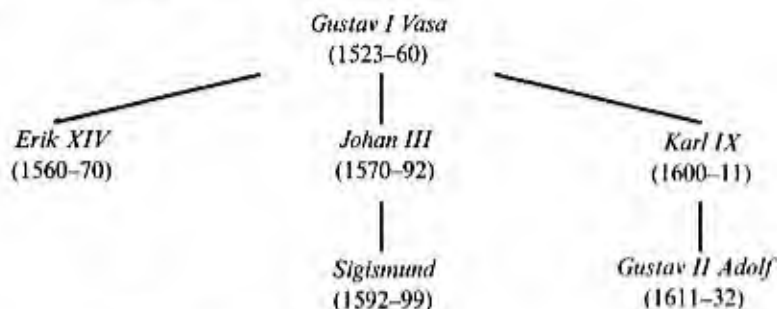


Figure 2 Swedish kings, 1523-1632

princess and Sigismund, their son, was brought up according to his mother's faith. In 1587 Johan managed to have Sigismund elected king of Poland. That the Swedish royal house gained in this way an influence over Polish affairs must have been regarded as a skilful political move at the time, but it was to have disastrous long-term consequences.

When Johan died in 1592, Sigismund was made king also of Sweden and as a result the country suddenly found itself united with Poland through the double titles held by the new ruler. The situation was full of potential conflicts. Sigismund was not only a Catholic king of a, by now, predominantly Protestant country, but also an absentee ruler who mainly resided at his court in Krakow. The Swedish elites were not slow to react to both of these facts. In 1593, Karl – the third of Gustav Vasa's sons – summoned the Swedish Diet to a meeting at Uppsala in order to affirm their allegiance to the Evangelical faith. This act was widely regarded as a symbol of the independence of Sweden from the Catholic church and from Sigismund's rule. With the support of the Council in Stockholm, Karl was also elected Chancellor of the Realm. The political alliance which allowed Karl to carry out these acts of defiance, was, however, never particularly solid. Many members of the aristocracy still regarded the Vasa family as usurpers and advocated a return of power to the traditional, pre-1523, elites. Others continued to feel an allegiance to Sigismund who, after all, when judged by the laws laid down by the *pater patriae* Gustav Vasa himself, was the legitimate ruler of the land. In this situation, Karl turned away from the aristocracy and made an appeal to the members of the two lower estates – the burghers and the peasants – to join him in a revolt. Many noblemen, including some members of the Council, fled to Poland. In 1598 Sigismund returned to Sweden at the head of an army in order to reassert his authority, but was defeated by Karl. A year later, Sigismund officially lost his Swedish throne.

Karl – now Karl IX – started his reign by settling the business – through executions – with the domestic, aristocratic, opposition and by going to war against Poland. Sigismund, who refused to acknowledge defeat and who until his death in 1632 would continue to demand the return of the throne, sought the restitution of all his rights and possessions. Karl, naturally, refused to even talk about the matter. In 1604, the Swedish Diet decided that it was Karl's heirs that had the right of succession and that the legitimate – or 'older' – Vasa line was to be stripped of all its previous privileges. When Karl died in 1611 he was succeeded by his son Gustav Adolf who was sixteen years old at the time.

At the time of his succession to the throne Gustav II Adolf thus inherited not only the Swedish crown, but also all the unresolved conflicts to which one century of feuds within the ruling Vasa family had given rise.<sup>2</sup> He was the grandson of Gustav Vasa, and as such he could draw on the prestige that the name of his grandfather still commanded, but he was also the son of a man who had participated in two consecutive coups against two legitimate kings, and as such his position was far less than secure. On the domestic scene Gustav Adolf had to defend his position both against the counter-claims of Sigismund's followers and against those of the remnants of the pre-1523 elites. On the international scene he had to establish his position in the face of claims forwarded both by the Danes and by Sigismund, his Polish cousin, who still regarded himself – and was widely regarded by other European princes – as the only legitimate Swedish ruler.

King Gustav Adolf was, however, extraordinarily well qualified to deal with these challenges. As a young man he had received precisely that thorough and carefully planned education which Renaissance princes were supposed to receive. As a result he was well versed in the classics, in history, law, rhetoric and the arts, and fluent in a number of foreign languages, including German and Latin.<sup>3</sup> In addition he was brought up as a warrior and as a military commander, and as such was prepared to lead his country's troops in war. It was his training in these latter matters which was first put to the test. At the time of his father's death Sweden was involved in a war with Denmark and new wars soon broke out in the Baltic region and against Russia and Poland. While the war with Denmark was far less than successful, the war with Russia resulted in a number of overseas possessions being added to the country. After the treaty of Stolbova, 1617, Sweden included not only Finland and Estonia, but also Ingria and the county of Kexholm.

Yet Gustav Adolf would soon also make use of his skills as a statesman. When power was transferred to the young king in 1611 many members of the aristocracy saw a chance to advance their positions and to set a limit to





Figure 3 Sweden, 1630

the executive powers of the monarch. In the so-called Charter of Accession, promulgated in 1612, Gustav Adolf was forced to grant the members of the Council – and hence the aristocracy – a broad influence over political affairs.<sup>4</sup> The king could not, for example, involve the country in foreign wars without their approval.

The man who drafted the Charter, Axel Oxenstierna, was the leading member of the aristocracy, also a very young man – a mere twenty-eight at the time – and just like the king endowed with an exceptional combination of intellectual, administrative and political skills.<sup>5</sup> Oxenstierna could no doubt have become the champion of the noble estate in a renewed power struggle against the Vasa family, yet the earlier political infighting was not to repeat itself during Gustav Adolf's reign. Instead the Charter of 1612 provided a foundation for a new and unprecedented co-operation between the king and the aristocrats. Oxenstierna was made Chancellor of the Realm and he soon became the king's most trusted adviser. As their biographers invariably have pointed out, the two complemented each other perfectly as statesmen: while the king was 'ever *allegro* and full of *courage*', the chancellor was 'imperturbable, tireless, unhurrying, and wise'.<sup>6</sup>

One of Gustav Adolf's and Axel Oxenstierna's first joint tasks was to improve the country's rudimentary administrative system.<sup>7</sup> Through a number of reforms, new government bureaux of various kinds were established and staffed with professionally trained administrators, new law courts were also founded where the due process of law was emphasised, and through a new system of regional administration the central government gained efficient control over even the most remote regions of the country. Perhaps the most important reform, however, concerned the new procedures for the keeping of records. By a royal decree every clergyman throughout the country was ordered to record all births, marriages and deaths which occurred within his parish. Together these administrative reforms allowed for collective undertakings on a previously unprecedented scale. Since it was easy to keep track of people, it was also easy to collect their taxes; since the state was rationally organised, troops could be efficiently trained and arms procured. Together these reforms were to allow military actions of an entirely different magnitude.

In order to provide a more detailed map of the route that brought Sweden to war we must, however, turn to developments on the European continent.<sup>8</sup> In the early seventeenth century, European politics was entirely dominated by the great confrontation between Protestants and Catholics; between the defenders of the independence of the many small German principalities and the champions of the power of the emperor and the Holy

Roman Empire. In the course of the preceding century, the Protestants had made a number of important advances – manifested in the settlement at Augsburg in 1555 – which had allowed them a large measure of political and religious independence. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, however, the Catholic church was once again on the march and the *modus vivendi* between the two faiths was threatened. The militant propaganda of the Counter-Reformation, as well as a new sense of determination on the part of the Habsburg emperors, forced the Protestant princes to seek each others' support. In 1608 they formed a loosely structured alliance known as the Evangelical Union. A year later the German Catholic princes followed suit by forming the Catholic League.

The first open confrontation came in 1618 when Bohemian, Protestant, rebels threw an Imperial emissary out of one of the windows of Hradcany castle in Prague. A year later when the zealous, and devoutly Catholic, Archduke Ferdinand was elected emperor, the Bohemians responded by making the leader of the Evangelical Union their king. This was regarded as an act of open defiance throughout the empire, and in order to reaffirm Imperial authority, the leader of the Catholic League, the king of Bavaria, intervened on Ferdinand's behalf. The war which followed started well for the Protestant forces, but ended badly. The Bohemians, who twice had threatened Vienna in 1619, suffered a decisive defeat against the Imperial general Jean Tilly at the battle of the White Mountain in November 1620. Imperial rule and the orthodoxy of the church were reinstated in Bohemia and the Evangelical Union was dissolved by force. During the following two years, Tilly and his army continued to wipe out any Protestant forces which gathered against them.

The overwhelming victory of the Catholics did, however, turn the German crisis into an issue of general European concern. France, where Cardinal Richelieu had entered the government in 1624, became increasingly worried about the growing power of the Habsburgs, and the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries felt threatened by Tilly's expansion towards the north-west and the Baltic sea. As a result, various rounds of negotiations were held among the anti-Habsburg powers and efforts were made to convince either Denmark or Sweden to intervene in support of the Protestant cause. King Gustav Adolf participated in these talks, but he withdrew as soon as he realised that the other Protestant rulers were less than keen to see the independent-minded Swedish king as the commander of a large, united, Protestant force.<sup>9</sup>

Instead Gustav Adolf pursued his own wars in the Baltic. In 1621, the Livonian capital of Riga was captured by the Swedes, the county of Courland invaded, and by 1626 all of Livonia was in Swedish hands. As a

result of these advances, Sweden made contact with Polish territory and with the Polish army, and soon a military confrontation erupted on this southern front. To make war on Poland was not only a way of protecting and extending the Swedish overseas possessions, but also a way for Gustav Adolf to continue his feud with Sigismund, who had never ceased to demand the return of his Swedish throne. Despite repeated attempts to reach a negotiated settlement between the two Vasa lines, the talks never properly began. As chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, who was in charge of the negotiations, reported back to the king, the Polish delegates refused to acknowledge the credentials of someone who called himself the ambassador of 'Gustav Adolf, king of Sweden'.<sup>10</sup>

Although Gustav Adolf had refused to participate in any joint Protestant military actions against the Catholics, the discussions among the anti-Habsburg allies continued and in 1625 the Danish king Kristian IV decided to enter the German war on the Protestant side. From its inception, however, this intervention was an unmitigated disaster. Kristian never received the financial support he had hoped for from his allies and he was forced to fight with only his own troops. Soon Tilly's army – so successful against the Protestants in Bohemia – marched against him, and a new, second, Imperial army was created under the leadership of general Albrecht von Wallenstein. In August 1626 the Danish army was decisively defeated at the battle of Lutter am Barenberge. As a result of this defeat the Imperial armies were able to move northward, to occupy Mecklenburg and Pomerania as well as the Danish territories of Holstein and Jylland. Kristian IV was forced to conclude a separate peace with the Habsburgs at Lübeck in June of 1629.

In March of 1629, as a way to safeguard these military advances, the emperor issued a proclamation – the Edict of Restitution – in which it was declared that all Catholic areas which had passed into Protestant hands since the settlement at Augsburg in 1555 were now to be returned to the Catholics. The Catholic princes in Germany were given a free hand to wipe out the Protestant religion from the areas they controlled. Early in the year of 1630 – on the eve of the Swedish intervention – the Catholic victory in Germany seemed complete.

### **Making sense in the early seventeenth century**

Let us next consider an issue raised by our general, theoretical, discussions above. As I argued, the definition of both interests and identities must necessarily be connected to the processes through which meanings are created since only that which is meaningful to us can give us a reason for action.

Yet while the quest for meaning in this way may be thought of as a defining characteristic of the human species, meanings may nevertheless be created differently in different historical and social settings. This possibility presents a potential problem for our inquiry since the men and women of the early seventeenth century may have made sense of their world in a way very different from our own. Before we can begin to read the historical source material, in other words, we must first learn how to read it. We need to know how political issues were discussed in early-seventeenth-century Sweden; what counted as a good or a bad reason for an action; how reasons were presented and debated; what it took to convince people.

A first thing to notice here is the remarkable power which analogies held over the Renaissance mind. To the scholars of the period, but also to the common man, the world was saturated with analogical connections – all objects in nature, in society or in the heavens, were pregnant with symbols and hidden messages. And the symbol did not merely 'represent' the real, it *was* in a sense the real.<sup>11</sup> Each analogy indicated a hidden affinity between things or a common essence of some kind. Given this way of interpreting the world, it was very easy to give material features to spiritual matters, to see a part as the same as a whole, or to conclude that objects necessarily reflected characteristics of their owners. It was, for example, easy to discover a close affinity between stars and diamonds since both were shiny objects embedded in black matter, or to conclude that since alcohol burned explosively, people who drank too much of it ran the risk of being consumed in spontaneous combustions.<sup>12</sup> For the same reason, if you considered yourself a big man you simply had to live in a big house, just as you had to spend your money lavishly if you were rich.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps we could talk about this as the analogical *episteme* of the Renaissance.

In a world where these epistemic principles hold the only possible knowledge is knowledge of similitude.<sup>14</sup> 'To know' will thus inevitably be the same as 'to interpret': the intellectual task will always be to find a way from the visible mark to that which the mark symbolises. As a consequence, everything was turned into *legenda*, things to be read; the world was an open book and the scholar was the person who knew how to read it. However, since everything is always similar to everything else in one respect or another, there was no given limit or structure to this intellectual enterprise. Once the Renaissance scholars started looking for semblances they saw them everywhere, and in order to know more they constantly had to add more things to the analogies they had previously discovered. As a result, before they knew it they had compiled enormous, monotonous, lists of things that all somehow belonged together. Knowledge by analogy condemned itself to never know anything but the same thing constantly repeated.<sup>15</sup>

Closely related to the analogical *episteme* was the reliance on examples. To the men of the Renaissance, *exempla* enlightened and instructed and provided time-honoured pieces of advice. When a person – or, say, a member of a king's council – was in doubt as to which action to undertake in a particular situation, the most natural way in which to consider the issue was to ask oneself what examples the heroes and kings of the past provided. The books of the Bible – especially those of the Old Testament – supplied a number of answers to these questions as did the works of Greek and Roman authors. Because of analogical links of this kind, a king such as Gustav Adolf would never be seen solely as a contemporary person, but always also as a 'Judas Maccabee', an 'Alexander the Great' or an 'Augustus'.<sup>16</sup>

In the academic vocabulary of the time, analogies and *exempla* can be understood as *loci communes* (or *topoi* in Greek). A *locus communis* was a 'common place' where one could expect to find the arguments one needed in order to be persuasive in one's speech or in one's writing. The arguments associated with each 'place' were well known and explicated at length in the rhetorical handbooks. A *locus communis* could be relied on much as openings in a chess game may provide us with well-known sets of standard moves.

The importance attached to *exempla* also meant that the events of the past were accorded a special ontological status. Since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution we have characteristically come to think of history as 'Universal History', as, that is, a general and comprehensive account in which each individual event of the past can find its proper place.<sup>17</sup> In the seventeenth century, however, this comprehensiveness and universality were not yet established. There was no 'History' as a capitalised singular, only 'histo-ries' as a lower-case plural; there were collections of little stories about curious, fantastic, admirable or instructive things. As a consequence history could not be narrated as we like to narrate it – as the modern story of continuous progress – but instead, if anything, as a story of cyclicity or perhaps decline. Since this was the case the experiences of the men and women of bygone days were still directly applicable in the contemporary world. History was, in the standard phrase, a *magistra vitae*, a teacher of life.<sup>18</sup>

If everything in the world of the early seventeenth century was *legenda*, it was in equal measure also *dicenda*; if things had to be read in order to be understood, they similarly also had to be spoken. Since the affinities between things were hidden, an analogy could only be properly understood if it was explicitly drawn and spelled out in words. In fact, reading – even if



it was carried out in the solitude of someone's library – was usually done aloud.<sup>19</sup> Similarly intellectual debates were never thought of as abstract interactions between ideas, but always instead as verbal exchanges between opponents. An intellectual, political or religious investigation could only be pursued by a speaker who addressed another speaker in front of an audience. Reason only existed *as spoken*. This made the art of rhetoric into the most important intellectual tool of the era, and a rhetorical training also came to constitute the core of an educated man's education.<sup>20</sup> A number of Renaissance scholars wrote handbooks on the topic and classical Greek and Roman manuals on rhetoric were translated and revived.

As Aristotle had already pointed out, and as the rhetorical handbook writers of the Renaissance invariably reiterated, the most important thing for a speaker to learn in order to be persuasive was how to adapt him- or herself to the listeners. The key here was to start the argumentation from premises which the speaker knew the audience in question to embrace. Once such a common starting-point was found the speaker should go on to deduce conclusions which gradually brought the listeners closer and closer to the speaker's own – and perhaps very different – position. This was a *rhetorical* deduction, however, not a logical one, and the objective was not to 'prove' the logical truth of the conclusions, but instead to transfer to the conclusions the adherence already accorded to the premises.<sup>21</sup> In the manuals on rhetoric, this general, all-important, piece of advice was often translated into five separate tasks, or stages, which a successful speaker had to master. There was an *inventio* stage, first of all, where as many arguments as possible were to be 'found' or 'invented'; a *dispositio* stage next where the arguments were arranged in a suitable order; an *elocutio* stage where the arguments were put into words designed to educate, please or move the listeners; a *memoria* stage where the speech was committed to memory so that it could be delivered freely and forcefully; and an *actio* or *pronuntiatio* stage, finally, where appropriate gestures and enunciations were added in order to stress the most important points of the speech.<sup>22</sup>

Although the art of rhetoric pervaded all fields of discourse, the connection was particularly close between rhetoric and politics. Just as in classical Greece or Rome, great importance was attached to public oratory and in particular to the verbal skills of the ruler. In the Renaissance, the royal *eloquentia* was thought to have a peculiar – even miraculous – power. Through the power of his or her words, the prince was thought to be able to heal the sick, or alternatively, to spread disease or even death.<sup>23</sup> The words of the ruler could heal not only the bodies of individual citizens, but also the entire body politic. As the philosopher Philip Melanchthon stressed, the king's well-ordered speech was a reflection of the king's well-ordered

society. And through an analogical connection typical of the Renaissance, the causal relationship was soon reversed: the well-ordered speech could *bring about* a well-ordered society. A prince who had mastered the techniques of rhetoric, and who relied on them in governing his or her country, would ensure that peace, justice and piety prevailed.<sup>24</sup>

Given the special powers accorded to the Renaissance prince it was only natural that his or her education was the focus of special concerns. The prince was often assigned a number of personal tutors who educated him or her according to the latest pedagogical techniques. In fact, handbooks on the 'education of princes' even became something of a separate literary genre. In this respect king Gustav Adolf was no exception. He had his own teachers as a child – Johan Skytte and Andreas Bureus – and both of them were to remain close advisers throughout the rest of his life. In 1602 Skytte published 'A Short Education in the Arts and Virtues which a Princely Person should Practise and Employ', dedicated to the future king. Among the many arts that Gustav Adolf would have to master, Skytte stressed the art of rhetoric. 'The art of speaking well', as he put it, 'turns the heart of the people and predisposes it for whatever purpose'.<sup>25</sup> Under Skytte's tutelage king Gustav Adolf was educated as a *rhetor*, to be persuasive in his letters, speeches and debates.<sup>26</sup>

In the many discussions among the Swedish leaders which preceded the intervention of 1630, these rhetorical techniques are most characteristically employed in the *pro et contra* format of the debates in the king's Council. As their teachers had instructed them, before a decision could be taken each question had to be discussed as *argumentum in utramque partem*, that is, all reasons for and against each position had to be enumerated and defended.<sup>27</sup> The king himself seems to have been particularly meticulous in this regard. In the funeral oration which Skytte delivered in 1634 he commended his former student for

not proceeding in his *consultationibus* quickly and with haste or without ordering and asking some member of the Council to argue cases *pro et contra*, and to debate in the presence of his Blessed Royal Majesty, letting one or the other speak his mind, and with the utmost patience listen to the reasons and motives which were presented freely and without fear . . .<sup>28</sup>

As we might expect, the *pro et contra* technique was particularly important when a question was considered controversial, when the king expected to meet resistance to his plans, or when there were conflicting views within the Council itself. Careful notes were taken during these discussions and the arguments for and against a certain course of action were often recorded in separate columns in the protocols. Throughout the years preceding the

intervention, in one Council meeting after another, long lists of arguments were compiled where every possible position on every issue pertaining to the war was stated, defended and attacked. Over the course of the years, these lists grew increasingly longer and more unwieldy; important matters of state were mixed with trifles, domestic concerns mentioned together with foreign policy and moral arguments weighed against considerations of *Realpolitik*.<sup>29</sup>

Yet the analogical *episteme* also gave a prominent role to the dramatic art.<sup>30</sup> If the world was a book whose hidden similitudes had to be read and voiced, then the world was also a book which very easily could be adapted for the stage. The *legenda* and the *dicenda* could be represented in words and actions and *exempla* could be put into allegorical form. This naturally made the theatre into a very powerful pedagogical device. Through drama even those who lacked the skill to decipher the world could be *shown* the hidden affinities it contained. As such the theatre was useful in the education of the young, but also a powerful instrument of political propaganda.<sup>31</sup> During the Renaissance allegories with political implications were frequently put into dramatic form and their moral messages and contemporary relevance were spelled out for the edification of the general public. Through theatre the official view of the world would literally *come alive*.

A good example is provided by the court masques, the theatrical performances staged at princely courts throughout Europe.<sup>32</sup> At the court of Elizabeth I, as well as at many others, masques were performed at Christmas and Shrovetide, but also, and more interestingly, on occasions when political events made it necessary to redefine or reassert the ruler's interpretation of the world. When the coronation of a new king brought confusion regarding the future direction of a country, or when a loss or a win on a battlefield shifted the balance of power, the most natural response from the king and his dramatist-cum-political philosopher was to define the moment and to give it meaning with the help of a masque.

It is highly significant that the monarch often took an active part in these plays.<sup>33</sup> Again it was the analogical *episteme* which provided the rationale: by performing a role in the world of symbolic forms, the ruler could make the symbols real. The queen could, for example, be portrayed as a goddess in a pastoral idyll, or the king seen as Neptune, tamer of the elements, or Pan, god of nature. What the spectators watched here was not only a play, but the king or queen at play. And just as the royal *eloquentia* would bring order and harmony to society, the role the ruler played on the stage would have repercussions for the role he or she recreated outside of it. The play was a representation of the power of the monarch, but also an instantia-

tion of that power. Analogical connections made sure that the ruler ruled the kingdom as he or she ruled the stage.<sup>34</sup>

We know that the theatre was employed in this way also at the Stockholm court. At his coronation in 1617, for example, Gustav Adolf enacted the role of the ancient king Berik in a ritual joust. Berik, the king explained to his audience, was a Gothic warrior who had conquered not only Rome but also the rest of the world. Similarly in 1621, at the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Swedish state, plays showing the glorious deeds of Gustav Vasa were performed at Uppsala university and in the larger towns in the country.<sup>35</sup> In 1638, a *ballet de cour* was added to this ideological battery and in 1648 the philosopher René Descartes, invited to Stockholm by Gustav Adolf's daughter Kristina, staged *La Naissance de la paix*, a ballet glorifying the queen on the occasion of the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>36</sup>

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## Fighting for a national interest

Let us now turn directly to a study of the historical source material. In this chapter we will explain the decision to go to war as an attempt on the part of the Swedish leaders to act in a rational, utility-driven, manner; we will assume that Sweden went to war in defence of its interests and analyse how those interests were defined. To this end we will rely on statements made by king Gustav Adolf and other Swedish decision-makers throughout the course of the 1620s. Over and over again the reasons for and against an intervention into the 'German war' were discussed: 'What are the Austrians up to?'; 'How should we best respond?' 'If we go to war, where and how should we fight it?' 'Is a war really in accordance with the stipulations of international law and with the wishes of God?'

The primary source material is of three different kinds: protocols of the meetings of the Council of the Realm where the king's official group of advisers met to discuss the action; resolutions taken by the Swedish parliament, the Diet, and the speeches which the king addressed to its four estates; and letters exchanged between the king and his confidants – notably the Chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna – as well as the Danish king Kristian IV and other foreign, chiefly German, princes. In order to map this material we will arrange it along a time dimension and what we called in part I a 'communicative dimension'. Along the time dimension the aim is to study how the reasons varied from the first occasion on which the war was discussed up until the actual deployment of troops. Along the communicative dimension the aim is to study how speakers addressed audiences in different rhetorical contexts. The hope is that these two dimensions when taken together will catch all possible variation in the material. The time dimension will register how the reasons varied over the course of the years, while the communicative dimension will register how the reasons varied depend-

ing on the speaker and the audience addressed. Only by proceeding in this way, as I argued above, will we be able to weigh various reasons against each other and assess their role in constructing the actor that was the country that went to war.

### **On the road to war**

If we allow for a simplification we can divide the events which led up to the intervention into three separate stages: a first stage – roughly the period between 1625 and the end of the summer of 1628 – of Habsburg military expansion towards Denmark and the Baltic sea region; a second stage – autumn of 1628 to the end of the summer of 1629 – when this military threat decreased and the situation gradually stabilised; and a third stage – autumn of 1629 to the end of spring of 1630 – when the Austrians became increasingly interested in a peaceful settlement of the conflict, while the Swedes, for their part, grew increasingly defiant.<sup>1</sup>

In June 1625, the fragile cease-fire between Sweden and Poland broke down and during the summer and the following winter Swedish troops started moving into Courland and southward into Livonia. At the same time the Danish king Kristian IV finally decided to go to war against the Habsburgs. Yet this campaign turned out to be an abject failure: after the battle at Lutter am Barenberge in August 1626, the Imperial generals Jean Tilly and Albrecht von Wallenstein moved rapidly northward, crossed the Elbe, pushed into Holstein and occupied Slesvig and Jutland. Only the Danish islands were still outside of Imperial control. In September of the same year the Danish king turned to Sweden for help. While Gustav Adolf's strategy up to this point had been to observe German affairs from a distance, to strengthen the country's position in the Baltic and to pursue his own war with Poland in the south-east, this neutral stance had by now become increasingly difficult to maintain. This was especially the case once general Wallenstein in the summer of 1627 had sent a small contingent of Imperial troops as a show of support for the Polish king. The Habsburg soldiers in Sigismund's army connected, for the first time, the Polish and the German theatres of war.

In December 1627, Gustav Adolf briefed the Diet regarding the dangers posed by the Habsburg advances.<sup>2</sup> Our fellow Evangelicals are in a precarious situation, the king said: the emperor and the Papist League have occupied and subdued one prince and one city after another and now the same misfortune has befallen Denmark and the principalities bordering on the Baltic sea. Thus,



if God Almighty, in his mercy, the same danger does not avert, he [the emperor] would soon be approaching our borders, and from this we have nothing else to expect than the utter misery of the country, or else a long and difficult war.

What should we do?, the king asked. Should we 'sit still and receive the war within the borders of our fatherland', or is it better to 'take the war and its burdens onto the lands and provinces which are subservient to the emperor?'<sup>3</sup> In the Diet's reply they agreed with the king's assessment of the situation. It is a dangerous moment for our country. We know the emperor's intentions from the way he has supported the Poles with men: he is trying to deprive us of commerce and freedom of the sea. Above all his aim is to 'undo the rule over the Baltic sea which has been ours since times immemorial', not to forget the religious tyranny he has imposed on our fellow Evangelicals in Germany, a tyranny to which he seeks to subject us also. Therefore, they said, in order that the same danger not befall us, the king should, after due consultations with the Diet,

transfer the seat and burdens of war to a place which is subject to the enemy, in order that the borders of the fatherland may as long as possible be safe from the troubles of war and its inhabitants remain in welfare.<sup>4</sup>

During the spring of 1628, new contacts were made between Sweden and Poland regarding a settlement of the conflict between the two countries. The military successes of the Austrians in the war with Denmark had made the Swedish leaders more inclined to seek peace since the country could hardly afford to wage war on two fronts. In February 1628, Axel Oxenstierna met with Sigismund's men for a first round of negotiations.<sup>5</sup>

The same spring, the already precarious position of the Scandinavian kingdoms deteriorated even further as it was revealed that plans were being made for an Imperial naval base on the Baltic sea coast. From their newly won position in northern Germany a strong Imperial fleet would easily have been able to control shipping in the Baltic and to pose a serious military threat both to Denmark and Sweden. According to one scheme, the Hanseatic cities were to co-operate with the emperor in establishing such a Baltic fleet, but since negotiations with the Hansa had so far produced no results, the Habsburgs turned instead to Sigismund. In April 1628, Imperial ships began making use of the port at Danzig, and under the supervision of Spanish naval experts work began on a Catholic marine base at Wismar to which Sigismund promised to supply ships. In a move obviously designed to instil fear in the Scandinavian kings, general Wallenstein was given the newly created title of 'Imperial Admiral over the Oceanic and the Baltic seas'.<sup>6</sup>

On 1 April 1628 Gustav Adolf wrote to Axel Oxenstierna regarding these developments.<sup>7</sup> The king was very sceptical regarding the situation on the Polish front: any peaceful settlement here, he said, will only allow the Papists to intervene on Sigismund's behalf. In addition we have all the problems concerning the emperor's naval build-up in the Baltic sea. 'If traffic on it [Danzig] is opened up, the Papists will have so many ships that they easily could make both the Swedish and the Danish sea too narrow, which undoubtedly would result in the ruin of both countries.'<sup>8</sup> By now, the king continued, all wars in Europe have been mixed together and become one. The Papists are everywhere on the march: in Germany, at Rochelle and in Prussia.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore intelligence from the Austrian court informs us that a resolution has been taken 'to occupy the Nordic countries and to bring them under the tyranny of the body and the soul'.<sup>10</sup> To this end a large army is gathering in Germany which no other monarchy or republic has the strength or the resources to oppose. Our best option, said the king, is therefore to strengthen our power in Poland and then 'through the grace of God – who through his good will puts the proud out of power and puts the small in their stead – to push them back whence they came'.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of April 1628 a treaty of mutual support was finally signed between Sweden and Denmark. According to the agreement, Sweden was to supply Denmark with ships while Denmark would help Sweden reduce the Habsburgs' ability to use Danzig as a naval port. Kristian IV also promised Gustav Adolf that Sweden would be a party to any treaty that Denmark was to conclude in the future – a clause of particular importance to subsequent developments.<sup>12</sup>

During the same spring, a new factor was added to the conflict as the burghers of the northern German, and Protestant, town of Stralsund turned to the Danish king with a request for help against the advancing Austrian army. Denmark intervened, but once the treaty between Denmark and Sweden was signed, Gustav Adolf decided that he also should send his support, and in May a twenty-year defence treaty between Sweden and Stralsund was concluded. In June, Wallenstein laid a siege on the town, but was repelled by the joint Scandinavian forces.<sup>13</sup> In August 1628, on a visit to Stralsund, Axel Oxenstierna contacted Wallenstein regarding a possible settlement of their dispute, but despite earlier, rather amicable, informal contacts on the topic, Wallenstein now flatly refused any form of agreement.<sup>14</sup>

While the situation looked very precarious at the beginning of 1628, as of the autumn of the same year the outlook gradually started to improve. As it turned out, Denmark did not fall entirely into Imperial hands after all,

and a peace treaty was eventually concluded between Denmark and Austria.

The tone of Axel Oxenstierna's letter to the members of the Council of 30 November 1628 was, however, far from upbeat.<sup>15</sup> So far the negotiations with Poland are stalling, he reported. The emperor has his own men stationed in Warsaw and they are constantly soliciting Sigismund not to make peace with us, telling him that he will be reinstalled on his Swedish throne as soon the emperor has the Germans and the king of Denmark under his command. The plan of the enemy is to subjugate all German principalities under the *absolutum dominium* of the emperor, but since both Sweden and Denmark are great naval powers they could never put their plans into practice unless they could not also put up a fight at sea. This is why they have now set up camp along the Baltic coast, taken over all ports and seized one city after another.<sup>16</sup> 'Since their ambition ends nowhere, the emperor and his followers will come over to us unless they are first confronted in Germany.'<sup>17</sup>

In December, and again at the beginning of January of the new year, the members of the Council of the Realm met in Stockholm in a series of meetings in order to assess the situation. On one of these occasions they were addressed by the king who raised two issues.<sup>18</sup> First, was it not the case that war already had broken out? Was there not already an *actuale bellum* between Sweden and the emperor? Although Gustav Adolf could find reasons against such an interpretation the reasons in support of it were stronger:

1. The Imperial camp has interpreted our [support of Stralsund] as a hostile action and as a way to encourage the emperor's subjects in their rebelliousness against their proper lords.
2. Although the emperor has not yet declared us enemies, this does not imply that he means us no harm, but only that the time has not yet seemed ripe to him.
3. As the whole world knows, the general intention of all Papists is to annihilate all Evangelicals.
4. The House of Austria is seeking a *general* [sic] *monarchia* over the whole world and their next victim is Sweden.
5. The king of Poland is conspiring with the emperor to bring about the ruin of us and our country.
6. To this end they have sent an army against us in Prussia; prevented our peace with Poland; are seeking to prevent our trade and shipping; also seeking to undo our *dominium maris Baltici*; are subjecting our friends in Germany to tyranny.

7. He is threatening our traditional rule over the Baltic; he has made Wallenstein admiral of the Baltic sea and started furnishing ships; he has made it clear that he is not content with the German borders.<sup>19</sup>

Since it thus was clear that Sweden could be said to be already at war, the king suggested that they turn to the second issue of the meeting: could a military intervention 'to such a degree be considered just on our part so that we not only can conduct it with a clear conscience, but also with good reasons justify it before the whole world?'<sup>20</sup> This question, the king affirmed, is easily settled since our war will be a war of self-defence and since self-defence is prescribed not only by reason, but also by the laws of nature and nations as well as by the Holy Scripture itself. Once this conclusion had been established the only remaining issue concerned where the war should be fought and how the Swedes should fight it. The choice, as it was presented by the king, was whether to fight a defensive war in Sweden or to conduct an offensive campaign in Germany.<sup>21</sup> In their debate *pro et contra* the king's old teacher, Johan Skytte, began by giving all the reasons in support of a defence at home:

1. Defence is better than offence.
2. Transport will be easier.
3. Sweden lacks points of support abroad.
4. The country can easily be defended with the fleet.
5. The common danger gives the people courage.
6. History shows that those who defend their own hearth become strong.
7. To defend the well-known places gives security.
8. The example of king Karl IX [shows that such a policy is preferable].

Next Gabriel Gustavsson Oxenstierna, chancellor Oxenstierna's brother, replied to these points by providing reasons *contra*:

1. The first argument is more theological than political.
2. Offence gives more strategic advantage than defence.
3. There is one point of support, Stralsund, and from this city the war can be carried to the German heartland.
4. The position of the country is not entirely advantageous; the enemy can be tempted to lay sieges on fortresses and thus to obtain means for fighting the war within our borders.
5. The common danger may just as easily bring about resignation once the enemy arrives within our borders.
6. and 7. One should not put trust in the secure places in one's own land.
8. The example of king Karl IX is not applicable.
9. A strong reason to fight the war in Germany is that the tyranny of the

emperor will make the German cities and principalities join the Swedish side.

10. Abroad one could find the means necessary to fight the war.
11. At home we have lived in peace for a long time.<sup>22</sup>
12. A strong reason against fighting at home is that it would have to be done with the help of our own people, which would mean yearly conscriptions. Abroad we can rely on mercenaries.

When the Council met again on 15 December, the king was ready to ask them for their formal approval of the war plans.<sup>23</sup> Should we wait for the war to come to us, the king asked, or go against it while there is still time? This question, he stressed, must be considered in light of the fact that the war with Poland is likely to continue and that our means will not allow an offensive on both fronts. Where should we fight the war defensively and where offensively? In their reply, the members of the Council agreed with the king's assessment of the situation. All the actions of the emperor and his men indicate that they are not satisfied with the German borders and that they are on their way to us. 'Thus we have nothing to expect but a certain war and we see no way in which this can be avoided and prevented with reputation, honour and security.'<sup>24</sup> We could perhaps send a delegation to Vienna, they said, in order to try to settle the conflict amicably, but it is not certain that our men would even be received and 'it would be a disgrace to be disrespected and repelled in this way, as though we wanted to beg for peace'.<sup>25</sup> But even if we were received and given all sorts of promises, this would be nothing but an attempt to 'sedate us with the peace in order to attack us all the more powerfully at a later time'. Thus the members of the Council could 'see nothing better, safer, or healthier, than an early offensive military action'.<sup>26</sup>

At the Council meeting of 2 January 1629, the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the emperor was once again the topic of discussion.<sup>27</sup> In favour of sending a delegation to Vienna it was argued that a mission was necessary in order for a subsequent war to be considered just; Sweden had to be able to prove that all peaceful means had been exhausted. Besides, if Sweden did not attempt such a diplomatic gesture, the Germans would surely believe that the Swedish king was guided by 'petty ambitions and avarice rather than by the requirements of justice'.<sup>28</sup> *Contra* a diplomatic mission it was argued that 'a declaration of war should be carried out through the trumpets of war rather than through delegates.' In order to satisfy the enemy, it is not enough to send a peace delegation – 'only a good army will do' – and the emperor has given us enough reasons for such an action.<sup>29</sup> In concluding the debate, Gustav Adolf argued that the reasons



*contra* were stronger than the reasons *pro*. A mission will lead to nothing, he said. Not only is it not sure whether we would even be granted an audience by the emperor, but even if we were nothing would come of it since we and the Austrians start from contradictory premises; what is holy and just to us is profane and unjust to the emperor. Although normally peace should be sought before everything else, it is not possible in this case. And besides, as he added in a more cynical vein, peace would not be to our advantage since it would strengthen the emperor's influence in Germany and reduce ours.<sup>30</sup>

Instead of sending a delegation to Vienna, Gustav Adolf renewed his diplomatic efforts. His principal goal was to bring about some form of co-operation with Holland and England, the two most powerful sovereign Protestant states in Europe. But just as when similar negotiations were held earlier in the 1620s, these would-be allies seem to have regarded the Swedish king with a blend of suspicion and contempt.<sup>31</sup> Although Gustav Adolf's potential friends failed to help him out, he did, however, benefit from the mistakes of his potential enemies. As it turned out, the Imperial plans for a Baltic fleet had met with difficulties. Despite the joint efforts of Austria and Poland, and the support of Spain, the scheme had not yet proceeded beyond the organisational phase.<sup>32</sup>

The threat of a military invasion of southern Sweden was also radically reduced once peace negotiations between Denmark and Austria began in the city of Lübeck in February 1629. In accordance with the previous agreement to let Sweden be a party to any settlement concluded by the Danish king, Gustav Adolf dispatched his own group of negotiators to the conference. Judging by the instructions they were given, Gustav Adolf was still prepared to conclude a negotiated peace.<sup>33</sup> At the very least he hoped his men would be able to act as mediators between the two parties and in this way to force the Austrians to make concessions. When they arrived in Lübeck, however, the Swedish negotiators were brusquely turned away by the Emperor's commissioners who refused them permission even to remain on German soil. To the king this incident was a public humiliation of his country and of himself and he would return to it again and again in subsequent speeches and letters.

On 5 March 1629 Gustav Adolf wrote to Axel Oxenstierna reaffirming that a *bellum offensivum* was still necessary.<sup>34</sup> The following reasons, he said, convince me to carry out the war in Germany:

First, that the commissioners at the Lübeck conference have declared us enemies of the emperor. *Ex reputatione regni* [On account of the reputation of the kingdom] we cannot allow them to treat us unjustly and disgracefully. Secondly, it is impor-



tant to put the seat of war in another place than Sweden. In no place are we weaker than in Sweden, with its long coastlines and many undefended harbours. The emperor's fleet cannot be repelled by our navy alone. If we, on the other hand, put the *sedem belli* in Germany, occupy some cities and fortify them, our situation will be much more secure.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this belligerence, when the Council met on 18 April possible conciliatory measures were on their agenda. Once again the option of sending a mission to Vienna was discussed, but the members of the Council also emphasised the need to justify the Swedish action before the 'princes in Germany', the many local lords who formed the constituent parts of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>36</sup> It is important to make sure that the Swedish cause appears as just in the eyes of the world, the Council maintained. Yet a mission to Vienna was still out of the question, and for the same reasons as before. The members of the Council were afraid of not being received by the emperor, or if received, of not being treated with sufficient respect.<sup>37</sup> Instead the decision was taken to discuss matters directly with general Wallenstein and to this end an envoy was dispatched to Stralsund. Although the subsequent exchange of letters failed to produce any concrete result, it was at least clear that Wallenstein by now was interested in some form of peaceful settlement of the conflict.

On 25 April another diplomatic step was taken as a letter from king Gustav Adolf was sent to the leading German princes.<sup>38</sup> Here Gustav Adolf explained his reasons for supporting the beleaguered town of Stralsund and stressed that the action was not intended as a move hostile to the Holy Roman Empire as such but instead only directed against the 'private actions' of a few of the emperor's men. The king gave a long list of all the hardships and humiliations his country and his countrymen had suffered at the hands of these men and assured the German princes that a war, if it were to come, would be fully in accordance with the stipulations of international law.

At the end of May 1629, Gustav Adolf arrived at the Swedish general headquarters at Elbing in order to conduct that year's Polish campaign in person. On 16 June Swedish forces clashed with a united Polish and Imperial army at Stuhm. This was the first time the Habsburg contingent in Sigismund's army had acted offensively during the Polish war. News of the skirmish reached Stockholm as the estates of the Diet were in session.<sup>39</sup> In its declaration of 29 June the Diet urged the king to stand up against the Austrian threat and to take the war offensively into Germany. In order to justify this action they compiled a long list of complaints: the Evangelicals in Germany have been suppressed; the best parts of the country have been occupied; the Habsburgs have lent military support to Sigismund; treated

our delegation at Lübeck with disrespect; and sought to construct a fleet in the Baltic sea. If war is embarked upon, the four Estates assured the king, they would provide both the necessary taxes and men.

During the autumn of 1629, relations between Sweden and the Habsburgs once again entered a new phase. In September, a six-year truce was finally agreed upon between Sweden and Poland at Altmark. With peace concluded between Denmark and the emperor and a cease-fire between Sweden and Poland, Gustav Adolf had more room to manoeuvre. In September, Denmark made an offer to mediate in the conflict between Sweden and the Habsburgs. In an answer to Kristian, Gustav Adolf declared himself willing to join any settlement which did not go against 'justice and the welfare of our state and that of our friends'. He was prepared, he said, to meet the emperor's delegates in Danzig on 1 April of the following year.<sup>40</sup>

On 27 October and 3 November 1629, the members of the Council met in two extended sessions, this time at the royal castle in Uppsala since the capital itself was ravaged by the plague.<sup>41</sup> The agenda which the king had set up required them to discuss the treaty with Poland, but also to review all the arguments pertaining to a possible military involvement in Germany. 'Is it better to continue the German war offensively or defensively the coming year?', Gustav Adolf asked them as he already had done on previous occasions, and once again the question was thoroughly reviewed *pro et contra*. The king began by arguing in support of a defence in Sweden. We should rather defend ourselves at home, he said, since:

1. The Swedish and the Finnish armies together with new conscripts will give a sufficient defence.
2. Our ships can defend the Baltic sea, block the German harbours and prevent the construction of an Austrian fleet for another forty years.
3. Denmark can help us defend the Baltic sea.
4. This is a better way of controlling Holland.
5. We would gather strength and resources.<sup>42</sup>

To this list the king added no fewer than fourteen arguments *contra offensivum*, against an offensive war in Germany:

1. I am tired of war; the war will bring no glory, only domestic discord.
2. The subjects will be happy to hear about the peace with Poland and afraid when they hear that the German war soon will start.
3. We do not have enough resources and it is dangerous and expensive to rely on mercenaries.

4. Fighting the war on the German rivers, foreign merchants will start to hate us.
5. We have to fight in Denmark and the Danish king is powerful.
6. The Dutch may join with Denmark and attack us.
7. We will confront both Tilly and Wallenstein.
8. We cannot go across with a large army; the shipment of the horses will be very expensive. If the ships are scattered by storms, they will be attacked.
9. All levies, people, provisions, ammunitions, ships etc. are reduced.
10. The Danes are between us and the emperor. If we push him [the Danish king] he will join us; if the emperor pushes him, he will join him.
11. The Italian and French wars will be peacefully concluded if we start a war on this side.<sup>43</sup>
12. The private status of the king.<sup>44</sup>
13. Fear of the Russians.
14. Difficulties in using German people against their own *patriam* and rulers.<sup>45</sup>

*Pro offensivo*, on the other hand, as many as sixteen arguments were adduced:<sup>46</sup>

1. An offensive war is necessary since the emperor will extirpate all those who do not belong to his religion; the House of Austria has never ceased to seek for a universal empire; the emperor is likely to treat us with contempt and disrespect even though it now appears that he wants a peaceful settlement; there is already an *actuale bellum* on land and at sea.
2. For the sake of our own security: if we keep our fleet in Stralsund we can assure the city's defence and keep the sea clear; if we also occupied Wismar the Habsburgs would have no other harbour and almost all of their power over the Baltic sea would be lost; perhaps we could advance somewhat in Germany.
3. If we do not block his ships, the emperor will disturb our trade.
4. If he is not locked in, he will fight with us with equal strength at sea.
5. An attack would prevent his naval strength from increasing; he would exert all his force.
6. If we do not do it, the Dutch will and this would be all the more dangerous to us since they are already stronger at sea than the Austrians.
7. An offensive would force the emperor to feed off the land in Germany and prevent his strength from increasing in that country.

8. We could receive money in taxes on the rivers.
9. Stralsund cannot be maintained unless relieved.
10. Assistance to our co-religionists.
11. Otherwise the German cities will despair.
12. Safeguard the Polish cease-fire and secure the supply of taxes from Prussia.
13. Otherwise the emperor will meet us at sea and make difficulties for us in Prussia.
14. The French or some Protestant powers may join us.
15. Even if we all died in Germany, Sweden would still have enough strength to defend itself.
16. A settlement on paper and ink alone cannot be trusted.<sup>47</sup>

In concluding the session it was added:

the main cause of war between us and the emperor is that he wants to get power over Sweden and the Baltic sea. Whatever else the emperor has accused us of, is nothing but pretexts.<sup>48</sup>

When the members of the Council gathered a week later, every one of them voted *pro offensivo*.<sup>49</sup>

With this decision reaffirmed, Gustav Adolf once again set out to recruit allies. At the beginning of 1630 contacts were made with Brandenburg and with Johann Georg, the Elector of Saxony. Saxony was the leading Protestant power in Germany at the time and other Protestant members of the empire could hardly be expected to lend their support to a military action against the emperor unless Saxony was leading the way. In his response to Gustav Adolf's request, Johann Georg agreed that the actions of the Imperial generals had harmed the Swedes, but he also declared that he would have to remain loyal to the empire in the event of a Swedish intervention. Gustav Adolf's diplomatic offensive had once again proved to be a failure and his country was as isolated as previously.<sup>50</sup>

Despite these problems, however, the military situation continued to improve as it by now became clear that the Imperial plans for a Baltic fleet had failed. The crews that had joined the ships at Wismar had been dismissed during the winter and there were reports of serious conflicts between Austrian and Spanish naval experts.<sup>51</sup> In March 1630 the entire naval base, ships and all, was simply abandoned, and the risk of an invasion of Swedish territory was thereby conclusively removed.<sup>52</sup> Instead the Austrians began investigating ways to reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict with the Swedes, and Axel Oxenstierna was approached at the Swedish general headquarters at Elbing by various intermediaries from the emperor and his men.<sup>53</sup> As Oxenstierna reported in letters back to the king,

the Austrians had suggested a return of Pomerania and Mecklenburg to their *pristinus status* [original state] in exchange for a Swedish withdrawal from Stralsund. Our own security would perhaps be satisfied as a result of these concessions, the chancellor admitted, but we cannot trust the emperor's intentions. And besides, only a war can avenge us for the injustices we already have suffered.<sup>54</sup>

These conclusions were endorsed by the members of the Council when they met in session on 4 May.<sup>55</sup> Yet it is obvious that the Austrian peace proposals presented a new challenge to them. Was it really possible to carry out a *justum bellum* against the emperor even as he offered them a peaceful settlement of the conflict? Could a war really be fought justly if peace was not first sought? Would a continued claim on Stralsund mean that the Swedes asked for more than what the security of the country required? In support of this conclusion Gabriel Gustavsson Oxenstierna argued that any continued presence in Stralsund would appear as an attempt to extend the Swedish borders rather than as an attempt to help the Germans. Since we need their contributions in the event of a war, he said, it must appear as though we fight for the sake of their freedom. *Contra* such an interpretation it was once again repeated that Sweden can never be secure since the 'intentions of the enemy have always been to subjugate the northern kingdoms and to bring them under the Papist yoke.'<sup>56</sup>

When the Diet met in session a few days later they reiterated the conclusions already reached by the Council, but they also encouraged the king to go ahead with the Danzig peace conference in which the Danish king had promised to act as mediator.<sup>57</sup> Yet, they said,

we hold it best and most advisable that His Royal Majesty would soon follow after with the weapons, and push the treaty under his helmet, and not let go of everything which His Royal Majesty for the sake of our security possesses in their country.

They asked the king not to lay down his weapons before Sweden, the Baltic sea, Stralsund and all fellow Evangelicals in Germany were secure.

Five days later, on 19 May 1630, Gustav Adolf gave a last speech to the Diet as he was preparing to leave for Germany. Although some people argue that I undertake this war without any valid reasons, the king said,

I take God Almighty, before whose eyes I here now sit, as a witness that I have not wanted this out of a desire for war, but that I have been, for several years, to this end strongly incited and moved, since the Imperial groups have shown our delegation at Lübeck disgrace as well as having co-opted and made enemies out of the Poles with help of their Field Marshall and a whole army. Furthermore, we have to this action been encouraged by our highly esteemed neighbours and relatives; even

by distant kings strongly called upon to undertake this war so that the defenders of the suppressed religions may be freed of the Popish yoke; which we hope by the grace of God will happen.<sup>58</sup>

Swedish troops landed in Usedom on the northern German coast on 26 June 1630. When the Swedish peace negotiators finally arrived in Danzig at the beginning of July, the emperor's delegation had been waiting for them since the beginning of April.<sup>59</sup>

### Speakers and audiences

Let us now review the same source material again, but this time with a particular attention to the rhetorical contexts in which various arguments were used. As we have seen it was king Gustav Adolf who had the interpretative prerogative from the very first time the possibility of a war in Germany was discussed. The king was arguing for a particular view of events and the vision he initially presented defined the positions available to all participants and for all the years that followed. People could, and did, express dissenting opinions, but these discordant voices were heard only as parts of the total chorus that the king orchestrated. Yet Gustav Adolf was perfectly aware the people needed to be *convinced* regarding the necessity of war, and that they could not simply be commanded. Gustav Adolf may have been a Renaissance prince, but he was also the ruler of a poor country which only recently had begun to function as a coherent political unit. Which role Sweden played in European politics and which demands this role presented to its population was far from clear. Before they were ready to lay down their resources and their lives, the king had to show them that the war was a necessary, just, glorious or profitable enterprise, and to this end his training in rhetoric made him particularly well suited. As his teacher Johan Skytte had instructed him already as a child:

When war is to be begun and conducted, the lord of a land and a ruler may persuade his subjects with an elaborate oration to willingly pay taxes and other things necessary for war. When one wants to defeat one's enemies, eloquence has a great power in encouraging the warriors. When the power of a lord is on the run, eloquence may bring her back; when some grumble begins it may through the oration of a lord be calmed and brought to an end.<sup>60</sup>

There were three main domestic audiences for the royal rhetoric: the king's personal advisers, the members of the Council of the Realm, and the four estates of the Diet. In addition there were foreign audiences located at increasing distances from Stockholm: the Danish king Kristian, the Protestant princes in Germany, and of course the Habsburg emperor and



Wallenstein, his general. Even further away, we have audiences of a more abstract character: 'the whole world', 'God', 'posterity.' Before each of these audiences different arguments were presented, or at least given different emphasis in the king's presentation. In order to be persuasive, as the rhetorical handbooks had taught him, it was crucial to start one's argumentation from positions one knew a particular audience to embrace.<sup>61</sup> For us, however, use of this rhetorical technique presents a problem: if the reasons which took Sweden to war varied depending on the context, we may wonder which the true, the most important, motive was. Which among the many reasons invoked was the one that made Sweden act? Let us keep this question in mind as we review these rhetorical arenas and return to it explicitly at the end of this chapter.

Gustav Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna were of course used to discussing matters of state policy face to face, but since they were also separated during extended periods of time – when one or the other of them was in charge of wars or negotiations overseas – letter-writing was often their only mode of communication. These letters often concerned sensitive matters of military planning, and sometimes the messages were written in code. These are the real decision-makers, we feel, contemplating the future actions of their country.

There can be no doubt regarding the distribution of roles between the two. Both as a matter of official position and personal prestige, the king was the more powerful, and he knew what to do with the power he had. Gustav Adolf pushed matters along by suggesting new solutions to old problems and by constantly putting new topics on their common agenda. This does not mean, however, that the chancellor lacked influence. As the leading member of the aristocracy and as a man widely respected for his administrative and political skills, Axel Oxenstierna had his own independent power-base. That this power could be used in order to counter-balance the power of the king had already been obvious when Oxenstierna drafted the Charter of Accession. As the king was well aware, no war could be undertaken unless the noble estate could be convinced to support it, and given his influence with the aristocrats, Axel Oxenstierna's opinions counted for very much. Regardless of these more formal aspects of their relationship, however, it is quite obvious that Gustav Adolf appreciated and depended on the chancellor's advice. The two were good friends, after all, and their letters had a frank and unofficial tone. Axel Oxenstierna is in fact the only person to whom the king really seems to have listened.<sup>62</sup>

From the spring of 1628, the king and the chancellor constantly returned to one theme in their correspondence: the military threat posed by the

advances of the Habsburg generals towards Scandinavia and the concomitant plans for an Imperial naval base by the Baltic sea coast. If an Imperial navy were to be established in the Baltic sea, they agreed, the Swedish military support-lines to Estonia, Livonia and Prussia would be jeopardised and the Swedish naval base at Kalmar threatened. The danger was of course all the more imminent since the emperor was co-operating with Sigismund. Once the general military power of the Habsburgs was combined with the possibility of a new, hostile, naval force in the Baltic sea and a Swedish ex-king who only waited for a chance to return to his country, the threat was too big to ignore.<sup>63</sup> The only question was what to do about it.

The way the issue was framed by the king at the very outset of their discussions short-circuited the entire decision-making process. War is inevitable, Gustav Adolf argued – in fact there is already an *actuale bellum* between Sweden and Austria. And since this was the case the only relevant questions was where to fight: should we mount a defence in Sweden or should we conduct a military offensive abroad?<sup>64</sup> Once the question was put in these stark terms a foreign war would always appear as the best option. To fight at home – on Swedish soil and with Swedish resources – was simply too expensive. That a foreign war is preferable, Oxenstierna concurred, 'is an infallible axiom which hardly can be disputed by anyone'.<sup>65</sup>

Once this fact had been established, all remaining issues concerned matters of tactics and timing. Here the king and the chancellor deliberated between two alternatives: should we maintain a defensive position in Stralsund as before and continue to go on the offensive in Poland, or should we put the Polish war on the defensive while going offensively into Germany? In this debate the chancellor advocated, reluctantly, the former position, while the king, unswervingly, defended the latter.<sup>66</sup> The war in Poland is our own war, Axel Oxenstierna said; it is a war which has already been accepted by the Swedish public and 'we know its advantages and disadvantages'.<sup>67</sup> As such it can be stopped and changed according to the demands of time and circumstance; we can, for example, bring it to an end 'either with a treaty or with a change in the Polish government'.<sup>68</sup> In addition, as he pointed out, we are very short of funds and this fact alone may very well force us to go on the defensive on both fronts.

The king, however, did not agree with this assessment. In his opinion only a German offensive would conclusively remove the military threat. Only through a direct military intervention could Wallenstein be evicted from Prussia and Poland, the pressure on Denmark reduced and an Austrian attack on Kalmar prevented.<sup>69</sup> An intervention would also make it easier for us to win the German Protestants over to our cause, the king maintained; we can 'wake up those muted feelings that secretly are yearning for

an occasion for release'.<sup>70</sup> More than anything, however, Gustav Adolf stressed, an intervention is necessary for the sake of the city of Stralsund. 'The mood among the burghers in the city is not to be trusted and our garrison is not sufficiently strong to prevail in the event of an uprising or some internal trouble.'<sup>71</sup>

Although the operational issues of the war continued to occupy them up until the intervention itself, the letters between the king and the chancellor also broached other matters. In his letter of 5 March 1629, the king gave a prominent place to the 'Lübeck affair'. Among eight reasons for conducting the war offensively in Germany he put the treatment of the Swedish delegates at Lübeck as number one. The emperor's commissioners have treated us as enemies, he said; we have been publicly humiliated and the reputation of the king of Sweden has suffered as a consequence. I wanted a friendly negotiation, Gustav Adolf explained, 'but my delegates were turned away with threats and insults and were even refused the right to remain on German soil'.<sup>72</sup> We cannot allow them to treat us disgracefully.

Through his letters from Prussia during the winter of 1629 and the spring of 1630, Oxenstierna was responsible for interpreting and conveying the new signals sent by the emperor's men. The Habsburgs seem ready for a settlement, the chancellor reported in a coded message to the king; in fact I have been told

that the emperor's men are fully prepared for it and that they seek to come to a settlement with your Majesty; that at the emperor's court they have decided to seek all opportunities to do it; that the emperor has stated this to the German princes and that Wallenstein himself wishes it.<sup>73</sup>

But how could we, Oxenstierna added, ever come to an agreement with such a fickle, untrustworthy, partner? Surely the emperor was simply trying to buy time.

Although the letters between the king and the chancellor cover a wide range of topics, there are also issues that do *not* appear in their correspondence. There are at least four such omissions. First of all they make no references to the 'glorious past' of the nation or to the mythology associated with the 'ancient Goths' (to be discussed in more detail below). While the king frequently drew all sorts of historical analogies these invariably referred to his own experiences or to those of his own contemporaries. Secondly there are few appeals to the defence of the Protestant religion. Christian references – invocations of the might, justice, benevolence or inscrutability of the Lord – are of course ever-present, but whenever the defence of religion is discussed explicitly it is always done in the context of a defence of Sweden itself or a defence of the German principalities. A

third omission concerns the lack of references to matters of international law. While the political potential of various treaties and the treacherousness of various bargaining partners are common topics, the force of law *per se* is never acknowledged. A final omission concerns economic issues. Or, to be more precise: while economic issues were often discussed, they only appear as they pertain to the operational problems of the war itself. The question was always how to furnish the troops with food, clothes, weapons, or gunpowder, or how to pay the foreign mercenaries they had hired.<sup>74</sup> The king and the chancellor never discussed the general economic gains which might accrue to Sweden or to its leading classes as a result of an intervention.

Next let us turn to the discussions carried out in the Council of the Realm. As we have said, the Council was the official channel through which the nobility could influence the way the country was governed, and no military action of the magnitude of a war in continental Europe could be embarked upon without at least the grudging support of its members. According to the Charter of Accession, 'the knowledge and advice and the consent of the Council of the Realm' were required for all new conscriptions and war taxes.<sup>75</sup> Yet in the end the opposite relationship was probably the more important one: the Council was the primary channel through which the king could influence the aristocracy. In fact the members of the Council can hardly be called advisers in any real sense. Despite the endless lists of arguments *pro et contra* which their discussions produced, we never get the impression that the king listened to them before making up his mind. As he explicitly made clear on 3 November 1629, after he had asked them to vote on the question of the war,

The reason I have put the question thus was not that I myself doubted that an offensive would be best, but so that I would give you the possibility to argue against me. All the less freedom you will have henceforth to discuss whether I did the wrong thing.<sup>76</sup>

When debating the issue with the members of the Council, the king's aim was first of all to persuade them that his interpretation of the situation was the only one possible, and once they were persuaded, to co-opt them; to force them to lend their support to the war effort and to take responsibility for whatever consequences would follow from it.

The king's desire to persuade and co-opt cannot, however, explain the extraordinarily broad range of issues raised in these debates; if these were Gustav Adolf's only aims, surely a much shorter list of arguments would have sufficed. Yet, and as we have seen, the members of the Council

discussed not only the most important issues and the best arguments for and against each position, but also very trifling matters and very bad arguments. In order to explain this curious fact we must remember what we said above regarding the use of rhetoric in the early seventeenth century. When we read the minutes of the Council we are, we could say, witnessing a 'review board' at work. The Council was the forum where *all* possible positions and *all* possible arguments *pro et contra* were to be laid out and examined in minutest detail. In the technical vocabulary used by the Renaissance handbooks on rhetoric, the Council's work represented the *inventio* stage of a speaker's preparations: the stage when as many arguments as possible were 'found' or 'invented'.<sup>77</sup> Thus understood the aim of the Council discussions was *not* primarily to give a rational assessment of the various courses of actions open to the king, but rather to map what we could call the 'discursive space' in which the intervention would be discussed. The Council's work was designed to pre-empt every possible objection to the enterprise whether raised by foreigners, a recalcitrant member of the Diet or the Council itself, or even a counter-argument brought up by abstract audiences like 'Justice', 'Posterity' or 'God'.

Not surprisingly, the Council is also the forum which provides us with the most extensive list of topics of discussion. To begin with, just as in the letters exchanged between the king and the chancellor, military considerations played a prominent role. In his introduction to the Council meetings, the king repeatedly raised the question 'whether it was advisable and most convenient to pre-empt this war and to go against it with weapons, or to wait for whatever events and conclusion that God may give'.<sup>78</sup> And in their replies the Council members repeatedly assured him that 'there is nothing better or more advisable than to take the great and heavy burden which war carries with it onto the lands of our enemies and as far away as ever possible from our borders'.<sup>79</sup>

Although the military situation thus occupied much of their time, the most striking feature of the Council debates is the attention given to matters of international law. On every occasion provided to them, the Council members did their utmost to make sure that the action they contemplated was in accordance not only with 'reason', but also with 'natural and divine law' and the 'law of peoples and nations'. The war had to be considered just and the country had to be able to tell the world that this was the case. As we have seen, a number of discussions in December 1628 and January 1629 were devoted to precisely this topic, and in October and November 1629 the members of the Council returned to it again as they debated whether or not an attack on the emperor could be considered an act *contra Deum et conscientiam*. In fact, the most important issue on the



Council's agenda on the eve of the intervention was whether a war could be considered just even though the Austrians offered to make concessions.

Another legal matter of importance concerned whether Sweden should send a mission to Vienna in order to initiate direct talks with the emperor. As the members of the Council acknowledged, this was the course of action prescribed in the canonical text on international law: as Hugo Grotius, among others, had made clear, a country had to make sure that it had first exhausted all peaceful means if a subsequent war was to be considered just. Yet on every occasion when this topic was broached it was refuted with the same arguments: a mission cannot be sent since the emperor cannot be trusted; we cannot afford to suffer humiliation at his hands, or make it appear as though we were 'begging for peace'.<sup>80</sup>

Given its role as a review board, few issues were *not* touched upon by the Council. One such issue, however, regards the military and operational issues considered in the letters between the king and the chancellor. In the Council debates we find no discussion of operational issues of the war and not a word about the economic considerations related to the daily maintenance of the army. Other omissions concern several of the complaints which were primarily addressed to the international audiences (to be discussed below).

Our next rhetorical context is provided by the king's addresses to the Diet and its responses to his proposals. In a European perspective the Swedish Diet was a comparatively powerful institution since it, among other things, had the right to make decisions on taxes.<sup>81</sup> The Diet was also relatively more representative of the entire body of Swedish subjects than other seventeenth-century parliaments. It had *four* estates, not three as was the rule on the continent, and in addition to the nobility, the clergy and the burghers, peasants also were present at the sessions. Given the fact that the Swedish population at the beginning of the seventeenth century consisted almost entirely of peasants and that the nobility comprised no more than a handful of families, this is perhaps not surprising, yet it is also a reflection of the independent position of the peasantry in a country which had barely been touched by feudalism.<sup>82</sup> As we have seen, the fortunes of the Vasa family had on numerous occasions been decided by peasant armies, and uprisings in the countryside continued to be a feature of political life during Gustav Adolf's reign also.

It is, however, not correct to regard the representative nature of the Diet as a reflection of some unique form of 'proto-democracy'. Judging by the evidence provided by our material, the peasants did not particularly want to have a say in the governing of the country. On the contrary, they often



complained about the costs involved in travelling to Stockholm for the sessions and they compared 'the burden of Diets' to that of a tax.<sup>83</sup> Instead it was the king who insisted that they take part; since the bulk of any Swedish army would have to consist of peasant soldiers and since it would have to be financed mainly by direct or indirect taxes on agriculture, the active co-operation of the peasant estate was essential.<sup>84</sup> But just as the peasants could not be ignored, the power of their numbers meant that they could not simply be coerced; as the king was well aware, they had to be *persuaded*, and to this end the arena of the Diet was ideally suited. When the four estates were gathered in session, the king was able to address the representatives of all of the people at one and the same time. The Diet was the place where he, through his royal *eloquentia*, could create consensus, social harmony and order, and stir the body politic into action. During the course of the 1620s an unprecedented number of Diets were called – one almost every second year.

As we might expect, the Diet's discussions on matters of war and peace had an unmistakable concrete and material character. To the representatives of the people, wars were primarily matters of tax increases, the loss of farm-hands and helpers as conscripts in overseas armies, and requirements to supply ships and crews for the campaigns. The estates – especially the burghers and the peasants, but also the clergy who often sided with the peasants – were naturally opposed to all increased tax burdens and they repeatedly voiced their opposition. The king knew that tax increases on too large a scale would create dissension and perhaps trigger revolts.<sup>85</sup> His rhetorical strategy in this context was always the same: to remind them of the enormous costs they would incur if the Austrians mounted an invasion and the coming war would have to be fought on Swedish soil. This risk more than anything else was what convinced the Diet to lend its support to the war.<sup>86</sup> 'We humbly advise and encourage His Royal Majesty', their statement read on 29 June 1629, 'that he carries the war as far away from Swedish borders as possible, putting its seat and burden rather in the land of the enemy than that it should arrive at the borders of the country'.<sup>87</sup> Or more laconically put: 'it is better to tie the goat at the neighbour's gate than at one's own'.<sup>88</sup>

Yet, while the four estates when taken together may have constituted the Swedish body politic, this did not mean that the estates were equal when taken alone. As the dominant political theory of the day made clear, each estate had its specific role to play in society; the four estates may have formed an organic unity, but they were also functionally separated and hierarchically ordered.<sup>89</sup> The king adapted his rhetoric to this view of the political order and the different estates were consequently spoken to in very

different terms. In our material this is most striking in the speech – the ‘Farewell Address’ – which he gave to the Diet on 19 May 1630, as he was preparing to leave for Germany. Here Gustav Adolf addressed the people as a whole, but he also gave each estate its ‘individual greetings and admonitions’.<sup>90</sup>

The first estate to which the king turned on this occasion were the noblemen. They were addressed as knights and as ancestors of the ‘ancient Goths’, a mythological tribe which had once lived in Sweden but which had later set off to conquer foreign lands and to win immense glories for themselves and for their country. If you only continue in manliness and knightly qualities, the king said,

you and your posterity may once more cause the far-flung fame and immortal name of your Gothic ancestors – now long forgotten, yea, almost held in contempt by other nations – to be known over the whole world, so that it may shine again with fresh lustre.

If you only

once more suffer yourselves to be led out to war, whereby, having gained an immortal fame, the respect of kings and princes, and broad acres as your reward, you will with the better reputation discharge the duties of your noble estate.<sup>91</sup>

The clergy – the second highest estate – were addressed only in their capacity as communicators between the king and the common man. As such, the king told them, you must

seek diligently to attain to righteousness; have a care of factions, and at all times so admonish your flocks . . . that they comport themselves tractably and quietly, giving to the crown and to their landlords whatever may be their due.<sup>92</sup>

The burghers were exclusively regarded as the representatives of mercantile interests and were accordingly addressed with the help of various economic arguments. The king’s strategy when facing this particular audience is clearly demonstrated by his speech to a meeting of the Council of Cities on 26 January 1629. Here the possibility of a Habsburg interference with Swedish trade featured prominently: ‘Although this concerns the whole country and its inhabitants’, the king told them, ‘the cities are especially concerned, since they have their income from sailing and from the sea . . .’<sup>93</sup> There is no better way to prevent such interference than to increase our navy, he concluded, since

you should rather use your capital for your own and the country’s defence than for adventures in other uncertain matters, which (if the defence of the country were neglected) would come to nought in any case.<sup>94</sup>

In his Farewell Address the king used far fewer words. When he addressed the burghers he merely wished 'that your little cabins may become great mansions, your small boats great ships, and that the oil in your cruse fail not'.<sup>95</sup> A similar laconic style characterised his remarks to the peasants' estate. For them he wished

that their meadows may be green, their fields bear a hundred-fold, so that their barns may be full; and that they may increase and multiply in all plenteousness, that with gladness and without sighing they may be able to discharge the duties and obligations that lie upon them.<sup>96</sup>

Rather like a poor farmer's only cow, the Swedish peasants were to nourish their master.

If we compare the Diet with other rhetorical arenas, it is obvious that the range of topics discussed here was fairly restricted. The estates never involved themselves with the operational issues of the war or in guessing and double-guessing the intentions of the emperor or other foreign princes. The Diet had none of the *inventio* function which characterised the work of the Council. Similarly while religious aspects of the conflict were often touched upon, this was generally done only in the form of an expression of concern for the safety of the country and the well-being of the German Evangelicals.

Yet the king did not only address his own countrymen but also various foreign princes: the Danish king, the Protestant princes in Germany and the Habsburg emperor and his generals. In addition a variety of more or less abstract entities were spoken to: 'the World', 'God' and Posterity'. As a way to organise this rather heterogeneous group of audiences we could perhaps think of them as located in circles at ever-increasing distances from king Gustav Adolf and from Stockholm.

In the innermost circle we find Kristian IV, the Danish king. Denmark was of course Sweden's traditional arch-enemy – the two countries had been in conflict ever since Gustav Vasa broke with the Danes in the 1520s, and during Gustav Adolf's reign relations were still strained. In fact Denmark had been Gustav Adolf's enemy in the first war he fought upon accession to the throne. Under pressure from the Habsburgs' military advances during the 1620s, however, relations between the two countries became somewhat more amicable. Kristian was a Protestant king after all, a fellow Scandinavian, and after the debacle at Lutter am Barenberge also a veteran in the anti-Imperialist wars.

The two kings met in person on 20 February 1629 at the Ulvsbäck vicar-

age on the border between the two countries. They had a number of issues to discuss, among them the upcoming Lübeck conference where Denmark was to negotiate for peace with the emperor, yet their discussions turned also to the issue of the Swedish war plans. 'What business does your Highness have in Germany', Kristian had asked Gustav Adolf, 'and in which way has the emperor offended your Highness?'<sup>97</sup> According to Gabriel Gustavsson Oxenstierna's notes from the meeting, the Swedish king replied with the help of a long list of complaints: the emperor had driven away his friends and family from their lands, Gustav Adolf said, laid a siege on Stralsund, furnished a fleet which has sought the destruction of Sweden and sent military support to the Polish king. Initially the Habsburgs had prevented a Swedish victory against the Poles and now they were preventing peace between the two countries.<sup>98</sup> However, since Kristian failed to understand how any of these alleged reasons could be considered a sufficient cause for war, the meeting ended in disagreement.

The differences between the two Scandinavian kings were only accentuated by the very different treatment they received at the Lübeck conference: while the Danes sat down to do business with the Austrians, the Swedes were humiliated and expelled from the territory of the empire. In a letter subsequent to these events, Kristian sought to convince Gustav Adolf that the incident should be regarded as a mistake rather than as an intentional action on the emperor's part.<sup>99</sup> Surely the treatment which the Swedish delegation had suffered was to be blamed on 'the emperor's *defectu instructionis*'. In addition, as Kristian also pointed out, the military contingent that Wallenstein had sent in support of Sigismund could not be regarded as a regular Austrian military unit and for that reason the Swedish king should not consider it an official Imperial act of aggression. Gustav Adolf was not, however, impressed by these revisionist interpretations. At the time we were in Prussia, he pointed out, the emperor's troops were flying the Imperial eagle, and as far as the Lübeck conference was concerned, 'my delegation could well have been admitted if the aim had been to seek the peace of Christendom'.<sup>100</sup>

In a circle located somewhat further away from Stockholm we find an audience made up of the non-Austrian members of the Holy Roman Empire. These 'German princes' were the recipients of a letter which Gustav Adolf wrote on 25 May 1629 as part of an attempt to win support in Germany for the Swedish cause. As the king tried to convince them, Swedish aid to the city of Stralsund was fully in accordance with the stipulations of international law and should in no way be interpreted as an act hostile to the Holy Roman Empire. We have always remained neutral and we have never concluded any treaty against the emperor, Gustav Adolf

stressed, and yet Imperial troops have attacked us in Prussia and prevented us from making peace with Poland. This unjustifiable behaviour on the emperor's part meant that if Sweden were to decide to undertake a military action in Germany there would be good reasons for it. Here the king inserted a long list of complaints: all conscriptions and arms purchases in Germany are allowed our enemy but forbidden to us; our letters and memoranda have been intercepted; they have tried to keep us and the country of Sweden away from all commerce and intercourse with foreign nations – the Lübeck peace conference is the most obvious, but only the most recent, example; the lands of our neighbours, friends and relatives around the Baltic sea have been devastated; our subjects have been plundered, robbed, and threatened with prison when travelling in foreign countries; all over Christendom they have let it be known that they will carry a powerful army against us in Prussia.

A similar list of complaints appeared in the *War Manifesto* published by the Swedish propaganda office once the first troops had landed on German soil.<sup>101</sup> The *Manifesto* was intended to justify the intervention before an international audience and it was published in Swedish, Latin, German, French and English, and appeared in no fewer than twenty-three editions. Here eight reasons were given for the intervention:

1. In 1626 the emperor's troops captured a Swedish courier who was treated roughly. The emperor has so made given no excuses for the incident.
2. The emperor actively worked against a Swedish treaty with Sigismund and promised him the military support of the common Catholic cause.
3. Swedish military recruitments in Germany have been interfered with and Swedish exports hindered.
4. In 1627 Habsburg troops supported the Poles in their war against Sweden.
5. Swedish subjects have been deprived of their ships and have suffered under the emperor's treatment.
6. The emperor has attempted to integrate Lübeck and other Hanseatic cities under his dominion and to establish a navy in the Baltic sea.
7. The friends and relations of Sweden have been attacked: not only Stralsund, but also the counts of Mecklenburg.
8. The Swedish delegates were shamefully treated at the Lübeck peace conference.

While the Swedes, as we have seen, appeared very confident and self-assured when addressing Danish kings or German princes, they were much more circumspect in dealing with the principal enemy: the Habsburg



emperor and his generals. There is in fact no direct communication between Stockholm and Vienna during the entire period leading up to the war, and even indirect contacts were taken only after much Swedish agony and debate. In August 1628, Axel Oxenstierna contacted general Wallenstein from his camp in Elbing, but the general's curt reply was nothing short of an insult. The Swedish king was a disturber of the peace, Wallenstein had said, and he had no business meddling in the internal affairs of the empire.<sup>102</sup> When the chancellor during the spring of 1630 received various intermediaries from the emperor he was clearly on his guard. Oxenstierna listened to their proposals and made sure that them understand that he was not averse to a settlement, but he did not commit Sweden to any future course of action.<sup>103</sup>

We find a similar apprehension in the Council's discussions regarding whether or not to send a peace mission to the court in Vienna. As we have seen, this issue was thoroughly debated *pro et contra* on a number of occasions: in December 1628, on 10 November 1629, on 4 April, and on 4, 6 and 29 May 1630. The conclusion reached by the Council was, however, always the same: 'we are too different'; 'we start from contradictory premises and reach contradictory conclusions'. And what if our men are not received once they arrive in Vienna? Or what if they are received, but treated disgracefully just as our delegation was disgraced in Lübeck? As they agreed, Sweden and its king could not afford to suffer another public humiliation. Yet, as they also realised, the emperor had to be addressed in one form or another. The stipulations of international law and morality required it, and it would demonstrate both to Germans and to Swedes that Gustav Adolf had exhausted all peaceful means before resorting to arms. After much debate the decision was thus taken not to send a mission to Vienna in the name of the king, but instead to send a single diplomat to general Wallenstein in the name of the Council.<sup>104</sup> Little came of these contacts, however, since the Swedes never felt they could trust the friendly gestures of their adversaries.

Audiences of a more abstract and intangible kind were those addressed in capitalised terms: 'the World', 'God' and 'Posterity'. Despite their metaphysical nature, these audiences often appear to have been present in the minds of the Swedish leaders. The Council, for example, repeatedly mentioned the need to defend one action or another 'in the eyes of the world'; the world 'knows' or 'does not know' that a particular action is or is not just. We can expect nothing but a war from the emperor, they affirmed on 15 December 1628, since 'the whole world knows' that the general intention of the Papists is to wipe out all Evangelical Christians.<sup>105</sup> If we do not lend support to our co-religionists, we can never justify our actions 'before



God and the world'.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, as the king made clear, his letter to the German princes was written in order that 'the whole world through Your Royal Highnesses may know' that Sweden had legitimate reasons for its support of Stralsund.<sup>107</sup> Almost as often, however, the Swedes addressed themselves to the past or to the future. We are not only obliged to undertake this action for the sake of the name of our glorious ancestors, the Goths, Gustav Adolf argued, but also 'God, the world and posterity' demand that we stand up against the enemy.<sup>108</sup>

If we summarise the arguments presented to the different foreign audiences, we notice that they differ crucially in one respect from those presented in the domestic contexts: when talking to foreigners the complaint is almost always that the emperor and his men had interfered with Swedish intercourse with other nations. For some reason or other the Austrians were not treating Sweden and its king in the same way that they treated other countries and other princes: the Swedes were not allowed to trade and to travel, to make war and peace like everybody else. The military action they contemplated would be just since they only demanded justice, that is, to be treated and respected as equal with all other nations.

### **Fighting for a national interest**

In this chapter we sought to explain the Swedish intervention as an action undertaken in defence of a national interest; the Swedish leaders acted rationally, we assumed, in order to gain utility. And as we saw, a number of different interests were invoked in the discussions and they varied both depending on the time and on the rhetorical context in which they were presented.

As far as the time dimension is concerned, it can, we said, be divided into three stages. During the first stage both the Swedish and the Austrian armies were on the march; Sweden pursued its Polish war southward into Courland, Livonia and Prussia, while the Habsburg generals moved northward in pursuit of the retreating Danes. When the two countries came into contact, it was the Austrians who appeared to be the stronger: all of Denmark was ready to fall into their hands, they made plans for an Imperial fleet that could sail the Baltic sea, and they sent troops in support of king Sigismund in Poland. During the second stage, however, the military threat to Sweden was gradually reduced. As it turned out Denmark was never entirely occupied and the Lübeck treaty between Denmark and Austria, as well as the subsequent truce between Sweden and Poland, stabilised the situation on both fronts. In the final stage before the intervention, Sweden's position improved even further. By now the Habsburg plans for a

Baltic fleet had failed, and instead the Austrians began investigating ways of reaching a peaceful conclusion to the conflict. Axel Oxenstierna was approached by various Imperial emissaries, but – highly suspicious of the emperor's intentions – the Swedish leaders grew increasingly defiant. We cannot trust them, they concluded, and even if a negotiated settlement would guarantee our security, it would not avenge the injustices we already have suffered.

As we saw, these developments were discussed in quite different terms depending on the rhetorical context. In the letters exchanged between Gustav Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna, the Austrian military advances were addressed at great length, together with various operational and financial issues of the war. In the Council also the military threat was discussed, but so were practically all other issues pertaining to the conflict; the Council served as a review board, we said, where all arguments on all possible positions were laid out and dissected. The Diet was a particularly important forum for the king's rhetoric. Here he could address himself to all of the people, but also to each estate and give them their individual admonitions. In the Diet the war was always discussed as a matter of tax increases and new conscriptions. In addition to these domestic audiences, however, foreigners also were addressed. With the Danish king Gustav Adolf talked as a fellow Protestant and Scandinavian; in their letters and at their personal meeting, Kristian sought to present alternative interpretations of the events that had transpired, but Gustav Adolf made it clear that he was not prepared to change his mind. Before the continental audience – the German princes in particular – the aim was primarily to justify the Swedish support of Stralsund. Yet the most important of audiences – the emperor – was never directly addressed. Although the Council on several occasions considered sending a mission to Vienna, they instead ended up dispatching a single diplomat to general Wallenstein. The theme stressed before the foreign audiences was always the same: why are the Habsburgs interfering with our interactions with the rest of the world? Why are we not given the respect which is our due?

King Gustav Adolf occupied a central position in all these debates; he was the one who pushed the matter along by constantly putting new issues on the agenda. As the king was acutely aware, however, he could not coerce his subjects into going to war, instead they had to be persuaded. To this end he fell back on his training in rhetoric and he adapted himself very skilfully to the particular audience he happened to be addressing as well as to the unfolding of events. In the initial period of Habsburg advances, the king's aim was to alert the people to the approaching danger and to convince them to lend their resources to a potential war. This is not to say, however, that

he necessarily had a clear strategy worked out for himself already at the very beginning of events. His aim was rather, and more subtly, to create an *awareness* of the dangers threatening the country and thus an atmosphere in which it was possible to ask people to make sacrifices. Once his subjects had been brought to accept his gloomy view of the situation, they were also likely to accept his plans for improvements. The aim of the royal *eloquentia* was to establish a set of initial premises from which many different rhetorical deductions could be made.

To this end it served the king's purposes to argue that war was inevitable, or, as he did at the Council meetings in December 1628, to say that there already was an *actuale bellum* with Austria. Since Sweden had been attacked, a military response could be justified both according to the Holy Scripture and according to the canons of international law. If there indeed already was an *actuale bellum* and if Sweden indeed had a just cause for fighting it, the only question left to consider was where to confront the enemy – in Sweden or abroad. Yet this matter too was easily settled, and in making his case Gustav Adolf once again relied on a classical *locus communis*. Demosthenes, the Greek orator, had presented the Athenians with the same choice:

In a word, fellow Athenians, you must not lose sight of this fact: you have the choice between attacking Philip [of Macedon] in his own land or being attacked by Philip in yours. Is it necessary to show the difference between making war in his land or in ours?<sup>109</sup>

Arguing about his own war the same way that Demosthenes had argued about his, Gustav Adolf knew he would achieve the same effect. If we admit that the choice is reduced to one of the two alternatives, we must choose the least destructive option. A war fought at home, fuelled by domestic resources, would simply be too expensive; wars in the seventeenth century should preferably 'feed themselves in *hostico*' and an external war was for that reason *always* to be preferred.<sup>110</sup> 'All experience and all reasons', the king explained, 'indicate that it is indisputably better to carry out the war in the land of the enemy than to wait for it in one's own'.<sup>111</sup> Once the question had been framed in these terms, the matter was settled: if a war was inevitable, it would have to be a *foreign* war.

Why, then, did Sweden go to war? The one issue repeatedly stressed from the beginning of the period concerns the military threat to the security of the country. The Austrian successes in the war against Denmark, the naval build-up at Wismar and the risk of an Imperial attack on Sweden itself, are themes that recur in *all* of our material and *regardless* of the audience addressed. We must defend ourselves, the king affirmed before all domes-

tic audiences, and the domestic audiences all agreed. Given our kind of a country and this kind of a threat, it is in our interest to intervene militarily into Germany. All other matters – religion, morality and international law, economic considerations – were only of a secondary, or tertiary, importance. In fact these latter factors were discussed only as they pertained to the military defence issue.

So far, so good. The problem is only that the course of events failed to conform to the king's initial interpretation. Compare the first and the final stages on the road to war. In the beginning, the danger was clear and immediate and so were the reasons for the action, yet the Swedes failed to act at this time. Only years later, when the risk of an invasion had disappeared and Swedish naval supremacy was assured, did the country go to war. Curiously enough, the resolve of the Swedish leaders seemed to vary *inversely* with their reasons for undertaking the action. There was no risk of an Austrian intervention in the spring of 1630, no security interest for Sweden to defend, and hence *no German war could be fought in defence of such an interest*.

The only kinds of interests that the king still mentioned in the spring of 1630 concerned matters of a very different, and much smaller, magnitude. The Swedish delegation had been humiliated at the Lübeck conference, Gustav Adolf claimed, the Austrians had intercepted some of his couriers and stopped some of his subjects from travelling and trading freely. If we want to explain the intervention in terms of a defence of some interest or another, these interests seem to be the only candidates left to us. Yet, as such they are hardly satisfactory. Surely these complaints concern no more than trifles, and besides they are most clearly stated precisely in those sources which historians traditionally have regarded as *least* reliable: the public letter to the German princes and the *War Manifesto* published by the Swedish propaganda office. Should we then conclude that Sweden went to war for the sake of mere trifles? Trifles, moreover, which were most vocally expressed in the most unreliable of the sources? Is this a rational way to act, and is this a rational way to explain an action? We may certainly feel that it is not, but how, then, should the intervention be explained?

If we insist on holding on to the modern orthodox model the only way to proceed here is to somehow rig our data. There are no doubt many different ways to do this. We could perhaps ignore the fact that the situation had changed dramatically by the spring of 1630 and simply disregard the absence of an Austrian military threat. Another possibility is to artificially inflate the importance of any of the minor matters that the Swedes were still complaining about in the spring of 1630. From the perspective of the modern orthodoxy it is, however, quite impossible to understand why

something like the humiliating incident at Lübeck should have caused the Swedes so much grief. In rationalistic terms the loss of utility suffered on this occasion was infinitesimal. Another possibility is to turn the Swedish leaders into virtual security freaks and argue that their need of security was such that they were prepared to go to war even in the absence of a military threat; that what they sought was not good enough security, but *absolute* security. Yet while we perhaps may agree that there are people who have preferences of this extreme kind, Gustav Adolf and Axel Oxenstierna do not strike us as being among them. And besides, the rationalistic explanation fails in any case. What utilities Sweden stood to gain from an intervention was far from clear, but what utilities they stood to lose was obvious – we cannot make sense of the action by weighing the potential benefits against the potential costs.

If this argument is accepted we may perhaps feel compelled to regard the whole enterprise as irrational after all. If we insist on holding on to the modern orthodox model, if we cannot find good enough support for an explanation phrased in terms of the defence of religious, economic or military interests, and if we feel uneasy about rigging our data, this is our only option.

These conclusions allow us to return to the explanations provided by the historians we reviewed above and throw some new analytical light on their perennial historiographical battles. As we saw, there are three competing explanations available to us: Sweden, according to the historians, went to war in defence either of its ideational/religious, military/political or economic interests.

To begin with ideational and religious factors, it is of course correct that they played a prominent role in the debates among the Swedish leaders. Yet, as we saw, the defence of Protestantism understood simply as a religious doctrine was never an issue; religion was always talked about in political terms, just as politics always had a religious dimension. What the Swedish leaders wanted to defend was not a particular religion, but *their* religion; the religion of the independent, sovereign, Swedes. To fight for Protestantism was always to fight for Sweden. In fact, it is striking how a religious justification for the intervention is absent from contexts where we most of all would expect it, such as the *War Manifesto*. Whether the Swedes, as some historians have argued, had an interest in protecting the 'German liberty' or the 'German freedom of conscience' is difficult to say since no such motives appear in the source material. Still we may perhaps assume that to the extent that these abstract notions mattered they did so only in the context of the liberty and freedom of Sweden itself.



As far as military explanations are concerned the threats posed by the Austrians did, as we concluded, play a crucial role in framing the terms of the debates among the Swedish leaders, but as we also saw this threat was gone by the time Sweden went to war. The intervention cannot be explained as an attempt to defend the country against a military threat since the military threat by the spring of 1630 simply was not there. Similarly we can hardly blame the war on Swedish 'expansionism'. While the eventual result of the intervention can perhaps be described in these terms, a desire to 'expand' was not a policy on the part of the Swedish leaders prior to the action. On the contrary, we have good reasons to believe that the initial war plans had very limited aims – mainly to defend the Swedish position at Stralsund.<sup>112</sup> The historians who have explained the intervention as an attempt to 'equalise the European balance of power' may perhaps be pointing to something important, yet to describe the action in these terms is to opt for a highly anachronistic vocabulary. We could no doubt talk about the intervention in this fashion, but it is uncertain what we would gain thereby and no such reasoning appears in our material.

Economic explanations receive equally scant support. The war had to be financed of course and there are many discussion on how best to feed the troops and how to collect taxes on the rivers in northern Germany. Yet these concerns were not reasons for the action, but became salient only once the action *was already decided upon*. The only occasions on which general economic interests were given a larger role was in the king's discussions with the burghers, and this is no doubt best explained as a function of his rhetorical training. As Gustav Adolf was well aware, the risk of an Austrian interference with Swedish trade was an argument which was likely to have a special appeal to this particular audience. The king's skills as a *rhetor* were crucial also in addressing the members of the noble estate, and as we saw, he appealed to their knightly qualities and their thirst for glory and the spoils of war. Yet the very fact that the king had to *convince them* means that the war cannot be explained as an attempt on the part of the feudal classes to gain economic benefits. The feudal classes may have profited from the war, as radical historians have argued, but prior to the event none of its potential beneficiaries expressed much of an interest in it.

Despite all the works written on the intervention, and despite 350 years of intense historiographical debate, no historian has so far been able to give a satisfactory explanation of why Sweden went to war in 1630. The reason, I believe, is that they have all been busy looking for that particular interest which the intervention was designed to defend, without for a second considering the possibility that no such important interest existed. Historians have relied on the theoretical map which the modern orthodoxy provided,



but this map, like all maps, showed them only some features of the historical landscape while others were obscured. According to the modern orthodoxy an action is either undertaken in order to further an interest or it is to be condemned as irrational. Since all historians agreed that an action of the magnitude of a Swedish war against a Holy Roman Empire cannot be irrational, there simply *had to be* an interest somewhere in terms of which the Swedish leaders could be said to act. And since this was their conclusion, the historians proceeded to invent that which they could not find. They inserted their own pet explanations into that empty analytical spot where, according to their calculations, an important, clearly defined, Swedish national interest should have been located.

In conclusion, let us return to the social science theories we reviewed above. Social scientists, we said, explain the initiation of war either in terms of the 'logic of the situation' which decision-makers face, or as a result of the operations of collective or psychological decision-making procedures. As should be obvious from everything said thus far, explanations phrased in terms of situational logic find little support in our material. The factors identified by scholars such as Choucri, North, Gilpin and Doran simply have no clear relation to the decision to go to war as we have reviewed it. There may very well have been an 'increase in domestic demand', a 'need for foreign markets', a 'structural power struggle' between Sweden and Austria or a 'reversal of power cycles', yet none of these factors can come to concern us except to the extent that Gustav Adolf and the other Swedish leaders interpreted them as such and to the extent that they acted upon these interpretations. Matter simply does not matter before it is interpreted, and materialistic theories alone cannot explain why there are wars.

Turning to the theories of decision-making mechanisms propounded by Bueno de Mesquita, Steinbruner, Allison and Jervis, we find that they are far closer to our own approach, although none of them fits our case particularly well. Graham Allison's model has problems dealing with a period such as the early seventeenth century in which there were few, or no, 'sub-national, bureaucratic, actors' and in which politics was not a game of 'pulling and hauling'. Similarly the intervention was clearly not, as John Steinbruner's 'cybernetic theory' would make us believe, the result of the application of a standard operational procedure. The political situation in the late 1620s was obviously quite extraordinary and for that very reason subject to a lengthy and careful review by the Swedish decision-makers.

As far as Jervis' psychological model is concerned, many of its mechanisms may perhaps be at work in our case. The Swedish leaders seem to have suffered from 'selective memory', 'selective perception' and 'irrational

beliefs' – they had settled on a view of the Austrians which no new information, no matter how favourable, was able to dislodge. Yet even if we grant as much, we must add that Jervis' model can play only a subsidiary role in our explanation since a theory which tells us how the mind works can tell us nothing about the conclusions the mind reaches. If we want to know *what* it is that is selectively processed or remembered, we need a historical account. Yet we may in fact not even grant this much. As our discussion of metaphors made clear, psychologists like Jervis have far too simplistic a view both of 'reality' and of the individuals whose psychology they seek to describe. To talk about *mis*-perceptions and cognitive *dis*-tortions requires that we can say what is *correctly* perceived and *un*-distorted, but as I argued, what is 'true' is never true 'in itself' but only so under a certain description or another. Descriptions will always vary and different descriptions cannot be combined, and as a result all notions of misperceptions and distortions will become hopelessly blurred. We simply cannot say that the Swedes 'mis-perceived' the actions of the Austrians since our only access to those actions will be through our own 'misperception' of them.

Ironically enough it is instead Bueno de Mesquita's 'rational utility theory' which seems most clearly relevant to our case. When we discussed this model above, the assumptions regarding 'unified state actors' and 'utility maximisation' may have seemed hopelessly far-fetched, but to a case such as ours these assumptions apply remarkably well. Given the determination of the king and his unrivalled position of power, the unitary actor approach to foreign policy analysis is a reasonably accurate description. At first blush Bueno de Mesquita's rationality assumption too seems to fit well with the data. It must be rare indeed to find a case where the policy options confronting a country are dealt with in an equally rational manner (and rarer still to have source material that documents the process of decision-making in such detail). Yet, as I argued, the many lists *pro et contra* are *not* to be understood as cost/benefit analyses in our modern sense, and Bueno de Mesquita's analysis is consequently not applicable to them. As we said, these lists were compiled according to the logic of an analogical *episteme* and since this made the lists very long and very heterogeneous, it would be quite impossible to carry out all the utility calculations which a rationality assumption requires. The lists were never designed to assure a rational decision, but instead that the action could be *justified* in the eyes of potential dissenters. It was the opinion of others, not the utility derived to oneself, that motivated these enumerations. This methodological point aside, however, Bueno de Mesquita's rationalistic theory would still be able to give an explanation of the intervention if only the potential utility derived from the action outweighed the potential utility derived from

doing nothing. This, however, it cannot do. In the spring of 1630 there were no longer any clear risks associated with inaction while an intervention was associated with enormous costs, even potential disaster. The intervention cannot be explained in terms of the maximisation of utility, we must conclude; it simply was not a rational thing to do.

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## Fighting for a national identity

After this failure to explain the intervention in orthodox, rationalistic, terms we should now consider the alternative which our general theoretical discussion introduced: even if the Swedes did not go to war in defence of their national interests, they may still have gone to war in defence of their national identity. As we pointed out above, however, there are a number of analytical steps that need to be completed before we can reach any such conclusions. We need to show that the action took place at a 'formative moment', that is, at a time in which new meanings became available and people suddenly were able to tell new stories about themselves. Furthermore we must demonstrate that the Swedish leaders were telling 'constitutive stories' about their country and that they sought recognition for these stories from the audiences that had the power to grant it. Our final task then is to show that recognition was denied under humiliating circumstances and that the Swedes acted – went to war – in order to demonstrate the validity of their self-description, to prove that their own descriptions of themselves did indeed apply to them. If we have a case where we can demonstrate all this, and where the modern, orthodox, way of explaining events produces ambiguous or perverse results, we can justifiably claim that the action in question was undertaken in defence of an identity rather than in defence of an interest.

### **Renaissance self-fashioning**

The 150 years prior to Gustav II Adolf's accession to the Swedish throne is the period which we, following the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, have come to call the 'Renaissance'.<sup>1</sup> The Renaissance, according to Burckhardt's characterisation, was a time of transition in which the unitary and static culture of medieval Europe was transformed into the pluralistic

and ever-changing culture of the modern era. In the vocabulary which we introduced above we could call it a 'formative moment'.

If we simplify a very complex development, we can explain the breakdown of medieval culture as a result of Europe's confrontation with the radically different, with otherness: most importantly, perhaps, otherness in the form of a Greek and Roman heritage. As classical texts on science, philosophy and the arts became widely known and widely diffused, educated Europeans were suddenly confronted with a discursive universe which was simultaneously a part of their own tradition, yet also curiously foreign and of course completely non-Christian. Similarly the great geographical discoveries of the period brought Europe in contact with new continents and cultures very different from its own. More often than not, the Europeans conquered these continents and subjugated their cultures, but in the process their view of themselves and the world in which they lived were thoroughly transformed. The confrontation with otherness provided the Europeans with a point of view from which the presuppositions of their own culture could be seen, analysed and questioned. The possibility of reflection brought the possibility of self-reflection and self-reflection brought criticism of the existing order and calls for political, social, religious and scientific change.

And change, once under way, was rapid. Through the Reformation, the authority of the church and its monopoly on truth were shattered. In the Protestant churches, Latin – the medieval, universal, language of science and religion – was replaced by the vernaculars, and soon national languages were introduced in the fields of scholarship, education and diplomacy also. In the sciences, Aristotelian models which emphasised the teleology of natural or social organisms were replaced by mechanical models which focused on the notions of 'space', 'force' and 'matter'. The world was despiritualised: man was transformed from a spectator of nature to its master and God removed from the day-to-day operations of the universe and relegated to a status as its original 'architect' or 'director'.<sup>2</sup> In politics, finally, a new form of subjects emerged – the absolutist princes – who rejected the universalistic claims of the church and the empire, but also the traditional claims of local, feudal, lords.

Although many of these changes happened imperceptibly and without much resistance, the rhetorical battles of the Renaissance were often intense. As is characteristically the case in a formative moment, groups with clearly defined messages managed to have a disproportionate impact on events: individual religious thinkers, groups of humanist scholars or natural scientists, could quite easily point to features of the world which traditional authorities could not account for. In some cases the church

sought to reformulate its dogma in order to incorporate these new facts, but in many other cases the heretics were instead excommunicated, or their books – or the heretics themselves – simply burnt. In order to gain legitimacy for themselves, the reformers and free-thinkers often invented new symbolic languages of various kinds or recoded old ones to fit their new purposes. In the process, new channels of communication were established. In a matter of a few decades after the invention of the printing press, books were suddenly widely available and both new and old knowledge were spread through cheaper and more decentralised channels than ever before.<sup>3</sup>

As traditional, taken-for-granted, meanings were undermined and new ones put in their place, new stories could suddenly be told and new identities created. The Renaissance was, in Stephen Greenblatt's phrase, a moment of 'self-fashioning', a time in which new selves were invented and presented to new audiences.<sup>4</sup> In the Renaissance two new such selves were introduced: the individual subject of *man* and the collective subject of *the state*. It is true of course that both human beings and political institutions of various kinds existed also prior to the Renaissance, yet it is nevertheless the case that these entities now came to be regarded in entirely different ways. Man and state came to be seen as independent and self-governing, as sovereign subjects who were masters of their own fate and who no longer simply filled predetermined slots in the inevitable order of things. What it in fact meant to be 'independent' and what a 'sovereign subject' should or should not do, was, however, far from clear. Curiously enough, as soon as the modern subjects came to be defined they were also turned into enigmas, puzzles in need of philosophical investigation.<sup>5</sup>

Let us begin with a discussion of man. As sociologists of the Renaissance have pointed out, the sixteenth century was a time of unprecedented social mobility throughout Europe.<sup>6</sup> Now for the first time since antiquity, even people of rather obscure origins had a chance to move upwards in the social hierarchy and to bridge previously unbridgeable social gaps. One reason for this increased mobility was that the upper class increased in size relative to the sizes of other social classes; suddenly space was available at the top and people moved upwards in order to fill it. Yet this also meant that the identity of the upper class came to be defined in a different manner from previously. Since many of its members had an origin in other classes, genealogy and birth could not conclusively define them; a person was no longer whoever his or her ancestors had been. Instead identities increasingly came to be regarded as personal achievements, as things which a person could acquire – win or lose – depending on his or her individual efforts. As a



result, people increasingly came to believe they could transform themselves into persons of their own independent choice; they felt they could 'fashion' their selves.<sup>7</sup>

This power over the self is evident in much of the poetry of the time and it was a recurring theme in Elizabethan drama. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, for example, Iago presents the endless possibilities open to him with the help of a garden metaphor. We can plan ourselves, he says, as we plan our gardens: either sow useful and beautiful plants, or let the land lie fallow; 'either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry – why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills'.<sup>8</sup> To think of oneself in these terms, however, is necessarily to make a problem out of one's self. If a person could become whatever he or she wanted to be, then who should he or she become? And who was that present self who was to choose between these different possible future selves? The pursuit of answers to questions such as these occupied much of the time of the characters of the Elizabethan stage. In the middle of a scene one of the dramatic *personae* could suddenly turn to him- or herself and ask: 'who is this person?', 'who am I?'<sup>9</sup>

But the *personae* of real life too addressed themselves to themselves in a similar manner. In fact it was often unclear exactly what the difference was between a fictitious *persona* leading a fictitious life on a stage and a real person leading a real life in a real world. Since people believed they could fashion their characters at will, so they were also in a sense actors on a stage. In fact the theatre metaphor became a *locus communis* which enjoyed a tremendous popularity throughout the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Queen Elizabeth's courtier, Sir Walter Raleigh, to take an example, relied on the image again and again. 'What is our life?', he asked:

a play of passion  
Heaven the Judicious sharpe spectator is  
That sits and markes still who doth act amisse  
Our graves that hide us from the searching Sun  
Are like drawne curtaynes when the play is done . . .<sup>11</sup>

'All the world's a stage', in Shakespeare's more elegant formulation,

And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts.<sup>12</sup>

Use of this metaphor was not restricted to England, however, nor was it a feature only of the language of poetry and drama. When the Swedish king Gustav Adolf visited the court at Brandenburg in 1620, for example, he attended a sermon which evidently made a deep impression on him. 'It con-

cerned', the king later recalled, 'how We here in this World play a *comédie* and how God who rules everything distributes the parts that we should enact'.<sup>13</sup>

To later generations of scholars and laymen, accustomed to taking their own personal identities for granted, the theatre metaphor has generally come to be equated with superficiality and pretence. The Renaissance man on the stage was a false and rather ridiculous character who compared unfavourably with the true and real persons the moderns took themselves to be. During the Renaissance itself, however, no such clear-cut distinction between truth and falsity was available: an actor on a stage was not what man 'pretended to be', but indeed what man *was*. Yet, like all metaphors, the theatre metaphor also could be expanded into different narratives and thus come to provide different perspectives on the human condition. In the Renaissance there were two such main stories. According to the first one, the stage symbolised the disillusionment and melancholy of human life. If man could fashion himself according to his own fancy, it was argued, then one creation was just as good and as valid as any other; that is to say, in the end just as arbitrary and as empty. According to the second story, however, the stage was an arena which was unique in that it allowed man to present himself as a creator of his own self and his own life. While life as such may indeed be meaningless, the stage and the actions we perform on it allow us to make sense of life *in spite of* this fact. We are never more human – and never more powerful or more dignified – than as actors on a stage.<sup>14</sup>

As these Renaissance actors also eventually realised, however, we cannot tell just any story or be whatever we want to be. Before we can truly become the persons that appear in the stories that we tell, our descriptions must be accepted as applicable to us, and to this end we need recognition from the audiences we address. In the Renaissance the one audience which really mattered in this respect was to be found at the court of the sovereign prince. The court was the leading social arena, the centre of political and cultural life, and the place where new customs, fashions and social codes were invented and developed.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, the court soon came to be thought of in terms of a stage: 'the courts of great lords are a theatre', according to the *Zedler Universal Lexicon*, 1736, 'where everyone wants to make his fortune'.<sup>16</sup> Young men or women who appeared on this stage appeared in front of the people they had to impress in order to establish themselves. Conversely, not to be recognised was not just to suffer a humiliation, but more fundamentally, to be denied a certain identity, and consequently banishment from the court was thought of as an especially severe form of punishment.<sup>17</sup> As we might expect, matters of 'reputation'

and 'fame' soon came to be foremost in every courtier's mind. To be famous was not simply a matter of being socially appreciated or popular, but instead a matter of being reputed *as some-one* or famous *for some-thing*; to have a socially recognised identity.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the court was not only a stage where fancy stories were presented about imagined selves, but also, as Norbert Elias has pointed out, a place where those same selves were disciplined. As we said above, in the Renaissance the upper class grew in size in proportion to other classes, and in terms of the social life of the court this meant that individuals of often very different origins were suddenly thrown together and forced to find ways of adjusting to one another. In order to make sense of this social hodgepodge, there was an acute need of rules through which actions and persons could be classified. Such a system was provided through the publication of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Civitate morum puerilium* in 1530. This book on manners and good behaviour – originally intended as a guide for the education of children – became the first real best-seller of the post-Gutenberg era and it soon appeared in a large number of different editions and languages.<sup>19</sup> As many subsequent writers turned to the same topic, readers all over Europe were suddenly confronted with an entire literature devoted to questions of appropriate conduct, manners and civilised behaviour. Although these were widely read, they found particularly avid readers at the princely courts and the courtiers took pride in mastering each rule, each sub-rule and all their concomitant exceptions. As a result, a new elaborate code of behaviour, *la courtoisie*, was developed which soon came to govern practically every aspect of courtly life. In a matter of a few decades, people became *courtois* or 'civilised'.<sup>20</sup>

Put into the vocabulary I introduced above, we could say that the rules of *la courtoisie* established a standard through which people could be identified and new identities recognised; the etiquette provided a ritual through which court membership could be affirmed and a person's place in the social hierarchy expressed and put on display. In order to 'be somebody' you simply had to follow the appropriate code, and to commit a *faux pas* was, conversely, to immediately identify yourself as a member of the uncouth lower classes.<sup>21</sup> People who aspired to enter high society consequently spent much time mastering these rules, and people who already belonged to high society were constantly preoccupied with matters of status, rank and standing. Particular attention was given to questions of precedence: it mattered enormously who was given priority when entering a door or who was seated next to whom at a reception; similarly questions of titles, family names, genealogy and heraldry often resulted in endless debates and quarrels.<sup>22</sup>

All of this is of course quite paradoxical. On the one hand the people of the Renaissance were proud self-fashioners who created their own selves through the sheer powers of their imagination. On the other hand, they were submissive slaves to custom; insecure and unstable characters who not only were disciplined by others, but who also constantly sought to discipline themselves. Yet, as I argued above, this is a paradox which is likely to appear at all moments when new identities are in the process of being created, tested and recognised. Formative moments are times of freedom and creativity *and for that reason* also times of rule-following and conventionalism. By submitting ourselves to a certain set of rules we not only choose the 'correct' action over the 'incorrect' one, but we also identify ourselves – and we ask others to recognise us – as the kind of person to whom these rules themselves apply.

### Setting the stage

In the Renaissance, man came to be regarded as a self-governing, sovereign, subject, I pointed out above, but the Renaissance was also the time in which the state came to be regarded in very much the same way. In the Middle Ages the claims of a prince always had to be weighed against the claims of other, partially overlapping, local or universal, authorities, and even in areas where the princes did have their own jurisdiction, the aim of statecraft was typically understood as that of finding the natural place for the state in the organic whole which was the community of all Christians. All of this changed during the Renaissance, however, as the princes rejected the claims of universal and local institutions, and as the goal and direction of the state came to be seen as far more problematic. Often it was simply not very clear what a state was, on what basis it claimed loyalty from its citizens, or why this particular entity should have pre-eminence over all others.

Yet if the state was turned into a problem, it was also, in Burckhardt's phrase, turned into a work of art.<sup>23</sup> The state too came to be thought of as a person who had an identity which could be fashioned very much as the identity of an individual. As it turned out, the state too could be compared to an 'actor' who performed 'roles' on a 'stage' before different 'audiences'.

The 150 years which preceded Gustav Adolf's accession to the Swedish throne had been the era of the great geographical discoveries. Within the brief period of a few decades at the turn of the sixteenth century, immense new territories had been discovered, and during the following hundred years these territories were also explored and gradually colonised. These

exploits did not only have repercussions for the people who lived in these – to the Europeans – previously unknown lands, but also for the way in which the Europeans regarded themselves and their place in the world.<sup>24</sup> In the Middle Ages, the universe had had a meaningful structure and every person or object in it had had its own place and its own purpose; the world was ruled by God and Jerusalem was its centre, its *umbilicus terrae*.<sup>25</sup> On the medieval, so-called ‘T–O maps’, the world was depicted as a circular disk which contained three large continents surrounded by one endless, mysterious, *mare oceanum*.<sup>26</sup> This picture was challenged around the year 1400 as the work of Ptolemy, the celebrated cartographer of Classical Greece, was reintroduced in Europe. Ptolemy’s earth was a sphere, not a disk, and on his maps land masses were pictured with unprecedented accuracy. Yet the real Ptolemaic revolution was brought about by the introduction of grid-lines, the system of co-ordinates which indicated the latitudes and longitudes of every object located on the map. When grids were superimposed upon it, space took on an entirely new meaning. Since the grid-lines never varied depending on the size of the map, all maps could be compared and all maps could be made identical. Space was everywhere the same, and a mile in Europe was a mile also in Asia. On a Ptolemaic map space stretched continuously in all directions and all places could be related to each other, not only to a religious or a political *umbilicus*.<sup>27</sup>

As the implications of this reconceptualisation were worked out during the course of the following centuries, a new notion of space and a new cosmology gradually took shape. In the writings of Giordano Bruno, the universe was ‘infinite’ and the earth had no centre; according to Isaac Newton, space was ‘absolute’ and given as an existence prior to and apart from matter.<sup>28</sup> Space was despiritualised, as it were, and increasingly thought of only in geographical and anthropocentric terms. The world became a world of men and of political entities which were conceived of as territorial units.<sup>29</sup>

As a consequence of these geographical discoveries and conceptual reformulations, the world simultaneously both expanded and contracted. When the earth was circumnavigated for the first time in 1522, it had turned out to be infinitely much bigger than anyone had ever thought possible, yet once circumnavigated, the world was also fully encompassed, and as encompassed it could easily be represented graphically or in the form of a model. The first known terrestrial globe – as opposed to a celestial one – was constructed in 1492, and the first globe showing Magellan’s circumnavigation dates from 1527. Similarly, when Amerigo Vespucci around the year 1500 visited the continent which Christopher Columbus had discovered a few years earlier, his astronomical observations made it possible for him to insert ‘America’ into the same system of latitudes and longitudes as the



other continents.<sup>30</sup> From the early sixteenth century onwards everything there was could be caught within the grid-lines of one single piece of paper. As a result, the world became graspable and manipulable. When depicted in the form of a *plani-sfero*, it could be carried around, copied, folded or stashed away; when modelled in the form of a globe it could be held in one's hand – as the king would hold an orb on a contemporary portrait.<sup>31</sup> 'Il mondo è poco', as Columbus is reputed to have said.<sup>32</sup>

Given these developments it is not surprising that the theatre metaphor increasingly came to be applied also to the world defined in geographical and territorial terms. In fact, the empty, continuous, clearly demarcated space that the Europeans had invented and then found was in several ways very similar to the Renaissance conception of the stage of a theatre. Once the earth was fully encompassed it became, just like the theatre, a closed and graspable space; and just as an earth overlaid with grid-lines allowed for the precise calculations of relative movements, the stage allowed for relative movements between actors and things. Perhaps even more strikingly: the new art of perspective, introduced in the theatre in 1605, required the construction of a system of grids just like that of the longitudes and latitudes on the maps.<sup>33</sup> It should consequently not surprise us that the term *theatrum* soon came to be applied also to collections of maps. Thus the first atlas of the world, printed in 1570, appeared as the *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, and it was soon followed by national 'theatres' in one country after another: *Le Théâtre françois* in 1594 and *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* in 1611.<sup>34</sup>

But all theatres need actors and once God had been forced to give up his career as a performer and retired to a position as director or play-playwright, the world stage was empty. It was on this empty stage that a new type of actor now began to appear – the state, personified by its ruler, the prince. From now on it was the performance of the princes that mattered; inter-state relations were inter-prince relations and politics on the world stage unfolded only through their actions and interactions. 'We Princes', queen Elizabeth I of England told a deputation of Lords and Commons in 1586, 'are set upon a stage in the sight and view of the world duly observed'.<sup>35</sup> 'We here in this World play a *comédie*', Gustav Adolf noted after his visit to Brandenburg in 1620, and we must play our princely roles to the best of our abilities.<sup>36</sup>

One reason for the rapid success of the prince-as-actor metaphor is no doubt that it blended very nicely with the medieval *locus communis* through which the state was described as a 'body'.<sup>37</sup> If the state was a body of which all social groups formed the parts, then it was easy to insert this body on



the world stage and to set it in motion. This naturally gave the 'head' of the body – the head-of-state, that is, the prince – control over the actions that the state/body performed. The king personified the country as we said – or rather 'bodified' it – and the various parts of the body were *his* parts.<sup>38</sup> In this way the Renaissance obtained an entirely new language for discussing world politics and as this metaphor was expanded into different narratives, states and state interaction increasingly came to be described in anthropomorphic terms.<sup>39</sup>

These intricate metaphorical connections were perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the theatrical performances, the masques, which were staged at courts throughout Europe. In the Renaissance, I pointed out above, drama had a peculiar power over the mind. From his or her position on the stage the king or queen could point out the analogical connections which held the world together, and by pointing them out make these connections obvious and thus real. While the analogical *episteme* in this way made the theatre into an important vehicle for all kinds of royal propaganda, it made it particularly well suited to convey matters of inter-state politics. The world was a stage, but if this was the case then surely the stage could also be thought of as a world. That is, the small stage of the court could be used to illustrate the events which transpired on the large stage of the world. In line with this reasoning political allegories were staged where the policy doctrines of the day were acted out for the edification of the members of the court or the general public. In the guise of Mars or Bellona the monarch would attack a treacherous enemy; or alternatively, if political circumstances required, dress up as Pax or Justitia and conclude an honourable peace.<sup>40</sup>

It is important to underline the very close relationship which these metaphorical connections created between the subject of the prince and the subject of the state. It is in fact often quite impossible to tell the two apart. The prince on the world stage did not, as we may be inclined to say, 'symbolise' or 'represent' the state; the prince *was* the state, he or she *embodied* it. The difference between these two conceptions is that while notions of political representation require there to be something 'behind' or 'beyond' a political actor, there was nothing behind or beyond the prince. The relationship was instead the opposite one: the state was possible since the prince *made it* possible; without a 'head' no political 'body' could ever survive. In fact, even to talk about a 'state' during this period is to rely on an anachronism. A 'state', as we have come to know it, has a high degree of stability and permanence, an institutional structure, a bureaucracy and a citizenry which remain the same even as individual rulers come and go.<sup>41</sup> In the Renaissance, however, none of these features were present. There was

at best only a rudimentary bureaucratic structure and it was, for example, often impossible to distinguish the public finances from the personal finances of the king. Thus early-seventeenth-century Swedes never talked about the Swedish 'state', but instead always about the 'fatherland' (*fäder-neslandet*, or *patria* in Latin) or most characteristically perhaps of the 'regiment' (*regementet*). A political order which is described in these terms is of course thoroughly personalised: the word *patria* was closely related to the notion of a *pater patriae*, that is, the 'father of the country', and to talk about a 'regiment' was always to talk about *someone's* 'regiment', that is, the 'regiment' of some prince.<sup>42</sup> Hence when king Gustav Adolf asked his subjects to be 'loyal to the regiment', he invariably meant that they should be loyal to him and to his personal rule.

Stages do not only need actors, however, but also audiences; we cannot be performers unless we perform in front of someone who is watching us and reacting to what we say and do. Naturally this was true also for the princes of the Renaissance, who often seem to be acutely aware that people were following and judging their performances. 'We must all act our part', king Gustav Adolf tells us, so that

when We are pulled behind the curtain of death, We from the master of Comedy, which is God, may be given the Crown of Honour, and from our spectators, which are the angels of God and all human beings, be given the praise which We honourably have deserved.<sup>43</sup>

Among the three audiences Gustav Adolf identified here, 'God' and 'his angels' may have been the two most important, yet they were also quite removed from the daily chores of politics, and in any case they would pass their judgements only once 'the curtain of death' was down. While the play was still in progress, however, the reactions of the human audiences were a more immediate concern. To a Renaissance prince there were always two main such human audiences: the prince's own subjects and the set of other princes. These were the two audiences the prince had to convince regarding the validity of his or her performance. In the Renaissance you could not be a legitimate ruler unless you were recognised as such by your own subjects, and you could not be a legitimate actor on the world stage unless you were recognised as such by other princes.

Not surprisingly the quest for legitimacy became a paramount political task for the prince, and a large number of writers set out to give the prince advice on precisely how to gain it.<sup>44</sup> As one of these authors, Niccolò Machiavelli, argued, however, it was not possible to provide much in terms of *general* advice since what a prince should or should not do to a large

extent depended on whether he or she was a 'new' or a 'hereditary' ruler.<sup>45</sup> A 'new' prince, who had only recently been thrust into power, would necessarily have to concentrate on protecting his or her own position and on strengthening the legitimacy of the rule. To this end quite ruthless and deceptive – even 'wicked' – methods might be necessary. A 'hereditary' prince, on the other hand, who was regarded both at home and abroad as the legitimate holder of a legitimate position, could afford to be more generous and more lenient. As Machiavelli explained, a new prince was always subject to uncertainty, contingency and to the vicissitudes of fortune, and as a consequence such a prince needed more *virtù* – more manly zest – in order to master Fortuna, the bitch goddess of fortune.<sup>46</sup> The new prince could not simply wait for events to unfold, but had to take fate into his or her own hands and act vigorously and forcefully in order to preempt the outcome which Fortuna had prepared.

### Stories of 'Sweden'

The Renaissance was a formative moment, I argued, in which old meanings broke down and new ones were established in their place. Around these meanings new narratives with new kinds of characters were constructed. People increasingly came to believe they could 'fashion' themselves and become creatures of their own choice. As we shall see, however, the identities of the new, sovereign, states were also fashioned in a similar manner. In order to carve out a presence for the state in time and space, constitutive stories were constructed on its behalf and presented for the consideration of the audiences which the state, through the person of the prince, confronted.

The young Swedish state and its 'new' prince are a good example of this process at work. Despite the often ruthless methods of Gustav Vasa, Gustav Adolf's grandfather, the idea of a 'Sweden', sovereign and united behind one ruler, was slow in taking hold of the minds. Recognition of the new monarch and the new royal house was often granted only grudgingly or, in some cases, simply withheld. Throughout the sixteenth century peasants in many parts of the country rebelled against the encroachments of the new central authorities, against new taxes, or in defence of their traditional liberties or their Catholic religion.<sup>47</sup> And even while Gustav Vasa managed to reassert his power, the following century of dynastic struggles and feuds within the Vasa family undermined the legitimacy of each new ruler. This was not least the case for Gustav II Adolf himself. As we saw above, he had come in line for the throne only as the result of the consecutive *coups* of his uncle Johan and his father Karl, and there was never a lack of voices – both Swedish and foreign – who questioned his right to rule. The pro-Polish aris-

tocrats were openly hostile, but even those aristocrats who were officially loyal to Gustav Adolf were initially very reluctant to grant him any extensive executive powers. Meanwhile peasant rebellions continued also during Gustav Adolf's reign: there were uprisings in the central region of Dalarna in 1613, 1614 and again in 1627, and in the southern region of Småland in 1616, 1624 and 1628.<sup>48</sup>

Outside of the country – in the eyes of the audience of foreign princes – Gustav Adolf's position was even more contested. The Danish kings could never forget the affront which Gustav Vasa had showed them and they sought every chance to humiliate Sweden and the Vasa kings. And Sigismund, Gustav Adolf's Polish cousin, continued until his death to fight to regain the Swedish throne. As far as the rest of the European princes were concerned, they most probably never thought much about Scandinavian affairs, but to the extent that they did, they most probably sided with the Danish kings', or with Sigismund's, interpretations of events.

The fact that Scandinavia was a remote region, and Scandinavian affairs virtually unknown in the rest of Europe, is worth some emphasis. When the world came to be seen as a stage on which the state/prince was the only legitimate actor, it was suddenly very easy to compare one state, or one prince, with another. Since they were participants in the same play, it was obvious what role each prince played and how well he or she played it. As a consequence, competition and rivalry increased dramatically. In terms of the analytical tools taken for granted by modern scholars, much of this interstate/inter-prince antagonism must be studied as a struggle for power and security, but at the time the same competition was more likely to be understood as a struggle for honour and prestige. Just as the men and women who gathered at the princely courts, a state and a prince had to be reputed for *some-thing* or famous as *some-one* before they could properly be said to 'exist'.<sup>49</sup>

When judged by these standards, early-seventeenth-century Sweden inevitably fell short. Sweden was an insignificant kingdom on the northern fringes of the European continent; it had a population of a mere 1.3 million scattered over an immense territory, no large towns except Stockholm, few skilled administrators, no entrepreneurial middle class or financial investors, and an aristocracy which was small both in absolute terms and in relation to other social classes.<sup>50</sup> And perhaps even more damagingly: the country was noted for exactly nothing. Sweden had no known achievements to its name, no distinguished history, no heroes, artists or scholars of even close to a European stature. As they compared themselves to the Europeans, the early-seventeenth-century Swedes came to suffer from what can only be described as an acute sense of inferiority.<sup>51</sup>

Someone who is nothing in the eyes of others, I argued above, simply cannot be. We can only develop a notion of a self to the extent that we are recognised by others under some description or another. Early-seventeenth-century Sweden was often not recognised, or alternatively, it was recognised only under highly demeaning descriptions. In order to improve on this situation, a very conscious effort was made to fashion a new Swedish self and to gain recognition for this self both at home and abroad. To this end a number of constitutive stories were told which created both a temporal and a spatial presence for the country. Here we will review what I take to be the two most important of these narratives: the story of the 'ancient Goths' and the story of Sweden as a 'Protestant country'.

With the help of the story told about the 'ancient Goths' the past which Sweden so sadly lacked was readily invented – a history complete with heroes, glorious exploits and unparalleled cultural achievements. With the help of this story the Swedes were connected to an origin and through the plot that took off from this origin the present moment in time was rendered meaningful and hence legitimate.

One of the first versions of this story was presented by the Swedish archbishop Nicolaus Ragvaldi at the Church Council of Basel in 1434. The Goths, Ragvaldi explained in a speech to the assembled delegates, had lived in Sweden in ancient times, but since they had been eager to win glories and riches for themselves, some of them had left their home in order to conquer foreign lands.<sup>52</sup> The Goths had been ferocious warriors, but also men of culture and learning; they had not only subdued Cyrus and Darius of Persia, but also conquered Spain and even Rome. As one of their descendants, Ragvaldi concluded, he should be given special privileges and he proceeded to demand to be seated in the best – or at least in the second best – seat in the assembly hall.<sup>53</sup>

During the following century, Ragvaldi's speech, together with scattered references drawn from the works of early medieval historians, provided enough source material for the construction of a full-fledged, Gothicist, mythology. Its most exhaustive treatment was given by the Swedish archbishop Johannes Magnus in his *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sveonumque regibus*, originally published in Latin in 1554. In this work, Magnus managed to trace the genealogy of the Swedish kings back to the very beginning of time. The Goths, Magnus claimed, had been separated from other Biblical tribes immediately after the Tower of Babel and the Flood when Japhet, the son of Noah, decided to settle in Sweden and to make his son Magog the first Swedish ruler. For many centuries they had lived happily and prospered in this northern land, but in the year 836 after the



Flood, when a man named Berik was elected king, he, together with a branch of the tribe, set off in conquest of foreign lands.

In the early seventeenth century, the story of the Goths was turned into what to a twentieth-century reader looks suspiciously like a state ideology. In 1611 Magnus' *Historia* was published in Swedish in an abridged version, but since king Gustav Adolf felt it was important to give the entire work a wider audience, he instructed the royal translator to 'put this work into our dear mother tongue, to the honour and glory of the fatherland'.<sup>54</sup> The complete version of the work was published in 1620 under the title *Swea och Gotha Cronika*, the 'Chronicle of the Swea and Gotha Peoples', in which, according to the elaborate subtitle,

are described not only the lives and famous feats of the domestic kings in their own land, counted from Magog Japherson, the first Gothic ruler, until king Gustav [Vasa], the mighty, Christian and blessed in memory, but also the foreign Goths' exemplary 'regiment' and great exploits which they have carried out in many places in the world and especially in Spain and Italy.<sup>55</sup>

According to this genealogy, Sweden was not only founded by the grandson of Noah and thus the oldest country in the world, but it was also the country with the most glorious achievements to its name. Naturally this provided contemporary Swedish kings with a place in a very distinguished line of succession. In fact references to the Goths were being made already in the names which Gustav Vasa's sons took for themselves once in possession of the Swedish throne. Since Magnus' *Historia* had counted thirteen rulers named Erik, Gustav Vasa's oldest son by the same name called himself 'Erik XIV', and for the same reason Johan became 'Johan III' and Karl 'Karl IX'. The political message which these self-descriptions conveyed was clear; while the legitimacy of the very first ruler by a certain name would always remain somewhat uncertain, the legitimacy of the fourteenth, third or ninth ruler with the same name would necessarily be much less in doubt.

Yet Magnus' *Historia* also provided a wonderful collection of *exempla* which could be invoked in discussions regarding contemporary political affairs, and king Gustav Adolf often relied on stories about the Goths in his attempts to unite the people behind the war effort.<sup>56</sup> In 1625, for example, when people were requested to support a war loan made necessary by the war in Poland, they were treated to a long exposition on the glorious deeds of the Goths and encouraged to imitate the courage and manliness of their forefathers.<sup>57</sup> And as we already have seen, in his farewell address to the Diet of 19 May 1630 the king admonished the members of the noble estate to



continue in manliness and knightly qualities in order that you and your posterity may once more cause the far-flung fame and immortal name of your Gothic ancestors – now long forgotten, yea, almost held in contempt by other nations – to be known over the whole world, so that it may shine again with fresh lustre.<sup>58</sup>

As the oldest country in the world, Sweden should, the king argued, 'have pre-eminence among all others'.<sup>59</sup>

Above we discussed the role of drama in the political propaganda of the early seventeenth century. The events taking place on the large stage of the world, we said, could very conveniently be displayed on the small stage of the theatre; by playing the role of his or her country in a court masque the prince could make a certain world view come true. Given this background and the state ideology of Gothicism, it is easy to make sense of the ritual joust that was staged at Gustav Adolf's coronation in 1617.<sup>60</sup> Here the new king played the role of Berik, his heroic ancestor, and throughout the course of the performance heralds reminded the audience of the exploits of the Goths and their victories over Estonians, Courians, Prussians and Vendians. As they pointed out, the time of Berik's election – just as the time of Gustav Adolf's own coronation – had been a time of domestic discord and strife, but Berik had united the people and directed its powers outward, against its enemies. 'We, Berik', as Gustav Adolf affirmed,

the victorious king of the old and invincible Goths, wish this worthy audience all happiness and welfare and hold for certain that, as the many among you who have read the history of the old Goths would know, We, ignited by a highly commendable intention and desire to make Us and Our subjects known and famous around the whole world through virtue and manly enterprises, have found that Our and their manly hearts, thirsty for glory, no longer can be locked and confined within the borders of the fatherland (large though it may be).<sup>61</sup>

Yet not only thirst for glory motivated us, Berik/Gustav Adolf continued, but also a wish to

seek revenge for the injustice and violence which our neighbours . . . incessantly and in many ways have caused Us and our subjects. . . . We would indeed have carried our victorious weapons further in the world, if the gods had not intended that We should give our descendants [i.e. Gustav Adolf and his contemporaries] the occasion to acquire, in the same way as Us, an immortal and praiseworthy name.<sup>62</sup>

Our glorious ancestry, Gustav Adolf told his people, has been forgotten and ignored by foreigners. It is up to us to remind them of who we are, if need be through the force of arms.

Although the stories of the ancient Goths may have provided the best connection between an imaginary historical origin and a legitimate Swedish present, not only the Goths were relied on for this purpose. Given

the analogical *episteme* of the era it was easy to draw all kinds of fancy genealogical lines between the past and the present. The world of the Renaissance was full of hidden affinities, and if only they were read properly there were few objects that did not in some way still bear the imprints of past glories. In order to document these connections and make them more widely known, a professorship in 'ancient Swedish history' was established at the University of Uppsala and a group of 'national antiquarians' was set up and ordered, as the king put it in his instruction to them, to 'search and gather all kinds of old monuments and things with which the fatherland may be illustrated'.<sup>63</sup>

As a result of these investigations it was, for example, demonstrated that the church at Old Uppsala was an early and almost perfect example of the kind of architecture that the Goths later brought with them when they conquered Rome.<sup>64</sup> Similarly philological analysis soon revealed a remarkable resemblance between the old Swedish language spoken by the Goths and the original Hebrew in which God had spoken to man.<sup>65</sup> And when, later in the seventeenth century, remnants of the fabled island of Atlantis – long thought to have sunk in the ocean – were discovered in Uppsala, no one was particularly surprised.<sup>66</sup> The relationship between these scholarly pursuits and the king's political aims is obvious: every new analogical connection was a weapon that could be used against the country's foreign detractors. The more prestige, honours and glories that could be associated with 'Sweden', the more necessary it would be for foreign princes to take the country seriously and to treat it with respect.

In the self-understanding of the king, his subjects were not only descendants of the ancient Goths, however, but also 'Protestants'. To be a Protestant meant to be independent from the authority of the universal institution of the church, and a Protestant monarch was hence a fully sovereign ruler. In addition, to be a Protestant Swede meant to be loyal to king Gustav Adolf, to unite behind his 'regiment' and his particular interpretation of the world.

Yet, while Gustav Adolf affirmed that Sweden was, and always would remain, a Protestant country, even he had to admit that it had not always been one. As we saw, Protestantism was introduced only by Gustav Adolf's grandfather, and it took quite some time before the Catholic religion was conclusively defeated. Throughout the sixteenth century, peasants continued to rebel in defence of the old faith, and Catholic archbishops continued to represent the country abroad. In fact, Gustav Vasa had not even been very successful in converting the members of his own family. His son Johan III contemplated different schemes through which the new religion

could be reunited with the old; Johan's son, Sigismund, was of course a devout Catholic; and – in an ironic twist of fate – Gustav Adolf's own daughter Kristina, who succeeded him on the throne, was to convert to Catholicism and die in exile in Rome.

Despite this ambiguous victory, Gustav Adolf had very good reasons for affirming his allegiance to the Protestant faith. To a ruler with absolutist aspirations, Protestantism offered a highly attractive combination of dogmas. Not only had Martin Luther declared the universal aspirations of the pope to be null and void, and thus provided a religious legitimation for sovereignty, but he had also urged the common people to be obedient and faithful to their secular rulers.<sup>67</sup> The Protestant church in Sweden was a *Swedish* church, and as a result, the state became the level at which supreme authority was vested in both the political and the religious spheres. And while the spiritual 'regiment' of the church was in theory to be separated as far as possible from the secular 'regiment' of the king, this separation of powers was never adhered to in practice.<sup>68</sup> Once its political significance became fully obvious, religion was simply too important to be left to the clergy. Witness the conflict between Sigismund and count Karl, Gustav Adolf's father, during the 1590s: when he called upon the Swedes to rebel against the 'foreign' ruler, Karl could do so in the name of *custos ecclesiae*, the guardian of the Protestant church.<sup>69</sup> By giving himself this title Karl drew both a religious and a political distinction. Sigismund was illegitimate, Karl could claim, since he was a Catholic, and Karl himself was not a rebel, but simply a man faithful to the church and to the Swedish people.

When Gustav Adolf inherited the Swedish throne and the conflict with Sigismund he also inherited this political vocabulary. Thus whenever he described himself as a Protestant he was simultaneously also reminding his people that he was their only legitimate ruler and that they should unite with him in opposition to the 'older' Vasa line. A Protestant Sweden was a Sweden which *by definition* was opposed to Sigismund and united behind Gustav Adolf and his 'regiment'. An occasion to explain these inalienable connections presented itself in 1621 when celebrations were held in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of the Danes and the founding of the Swedish state.<sup>70</sup> Here Gustav Adolf reminded his subjects of the glorious deeds of his grandfather, and through theatrical performances in all major towns Gustav Vasa was presented as, in Gustav Adolf's words,

an instrument and tool of God through which the Papist idolatry was abolished and driven out of our fatherland . . . For one hundred years now God has maintained his holy word among us and its true knowledge.<sup>71</sup>

Or as Gustav Adolf tells us in the introduction to the 'history of Sweden' which he began to write in 1627:

Since [Gustav Vasa] was a good king who cared for God's congregation, he disinherited those of his children who lapsed from the religion and the true knowledge.<sup>72</sup>

Because Johan III had 'brought up a Papist son contrarily to conscience and the testament of his father', Sigismund became 'unfit for the Swedish regiment'.<sup>73</sup>

The role of the Protestant religion was also reflected in the laws enacted during Gustav Adolf's reign. Through the Charter of Accession and again through regulations passed in 1617, conversion to Catholicism was punishable by expulsion from the country and Catholics who refused to leave could be sentenced to death.<sup>74</sup> The property of a person – or the property of the family of a person – who studied at a Catholic university abroad was to be confiscated, and people who maintained relations with Sigismund's court in Poland were tried for high treason. These laws were clearly politically, rather than religiously motivated, and the Catholic religion was judged not by its effects on the souls of the Swedish subjects, but instead by its effects on their minds and their actions. Since the unity and obedience of the Swedes had to be preserved at all costs, *all* other religions were regarded as threats, and not only Catholicism, but also Calvinism and Anabaptism, were outlawed.<sup>75</sup> While Catholicism had the distinct disadvantage of being the religion of Sigismund, of the Habsburgs in Vienna and of the pope in Rome, Anabaptism was almost equally abhorrent since it preached non-violence and disobedience, and while Calvinism as such could perhaps be tolerated, it was best banned as long as Dutch ships maintained a presence in the Baltic sea.

Yet the Protestant church was useful to the king not only as a body of dogma, but also as an institutional structure. Each Swede had to belong to a parish, each parish had to have a church, and church-going was compulsory for all adults. These facts combined to make the church into a highly efficient channel of communication – the only such channel in an age without mass media – and in the hands of the king the church soon became the most important vehicle for royal propaganda.<sup>76</sup> By all evidence, Gustav Adolf regarded the clergy as nothing but the personal intermediaries between himself and his subjects. The pastors talked directly to the common man and as such they were in a position to convey the king's instructions and make sure that order and peace prevailed throughout the country. When Gustav Adolf addressed the clerical estate in his Farewell Address he consequently urged them

to adjure your congregations, whose hearts are in your power to twist and turn as you will, to be faithful and true to their governors, and to do their duty cheerfully and obediently, confirming them in all unity and concord, so that they be not led astray by evil men.<sup>77</sup>

A specific institution which took full advantage of the church as a channel of communication was the *bönedagsplakat*, the 'letter of prayer', which was read in all churches throughout the country on the so-called *bönedagar*, the 'days of prayer', which the king had instituted.<sup>78</sup> Throughout his reign, Gustav Adolf regularly composed such letters which typically contained a statement regarding the state of the nation, a list of mandatory readings from the Old Testament, and the king's own prayer for the country. During the *bönedag* no commercial activities were allowed, no work or travel permitted except the mandatory trip to church, and 'vain and worldly thoughts' were banned.<sup>79</sup>

The ritual aspect of the *bönedag* should not go unnoticed. In a country such as seventeenth-century Sweden, with large distances between different regions and often very bad roads, people only rarely interacted with anyone from outside of their most immediate community. On a day of prayer, however, all Swedes could join together in a common prayer for victory; the same words were uttered – simultaneously – all over the country, and the people who uttered them were aware that they were praying together with all of their countrymen. The contrast to the prayers said in Catholic churches is striking: the *bönedag* was a *national*, not a universal, ritual, and the prayers were said in Swedish, not in Latin. As such these prayers could wield a truly awesome power: there was a widespread belief that collective praying on a *bönedag* could literally kill enemies and win battles. The only requirement for these remarkable results to be produced was, as Gustav Adolf stressed, that the people pray 'with one heart and a united voice'.<sup>80</sup>

### Making friends and enemies

The constitutive stories told by the Swedes also located the country in an affective geography of friends and enemies. The friends were defined in such a way that they affirmed the identity of the self: they were states in the same position and the same predicament as Sweden. Thus if Gustav Adolf's subjects ever asked themselves who they were, it was easy for the king to point to the friends of the country and say: 'that is what we are like'; 'we are just like them'. The friends were not only an example, however, but also an *audience* for the stories told by the Swedes, and as such an important circle of recognition. Their task was to affirm the Swedish identity by treating the country as one of its kind; to show that Sweden belonged with them and in



their group. Conversely, the description of the enemy was a mirror image which affirmed the Swedish identity by defining its opposite: the Swedes knew what they were when they knew what they were *not*. Yet this inevitably made the enemy too into an audience to whom demands were presented. The enemy too would have to recognise Sweden, if nothing other than as a state worthy of animosity and as an opponent on a battlefield.

Let us begin with the friends made by the Swedes. The most important of these were no doubt the fellow Protestant states, the 'co-religionists', to whom references were constantly made in the discussions which preceded the intervention. Since Sweden was a Protestant country, it was naturally a member of the community of Protestants – *det evangeliska väsendet*, the 'Evangelical entity'. Since this entity was seriously threatened in the 1620s by the forces of the Counter-Reformation, the Protestant states were, at least in theory, closely united around a *causa communis*, a common Evangelical cause.<sup>81</sup>

As a Protestant country which was still sovereign, Sweden had a unique role to play in the world, but also a special responsibility. A royal decree of 1627 granted the right of refuge in Sweden to any Protestant anywhere in the world who suffered under religious persecution, and the letters of prayer often spoke not only in the name of Sweden and its king, but also in the name of all Protestants everywhere.<sup>82</sup> Starting with the *bönedag* in 1625 a special prayer was read for all those co-religionists who suffered for the sake of the true faith, and the prayer was included also in the prayer-books used by the army:

Protect tenderly, dear heavenly father, our co-religionists, who miserably have been attacked by the Papists and whose lives and welfare have been threatened. Give them your fatherly assistance, that they may be released from such distress.<sup>83</sup>

In a proposition to the Diet in June 1629 the king repeated:

A person of an honest heart, granted his religion and the freedom of his country by the grace of God, must often let eyes and heart bleed, when he hears such wailing and misery among his friends and co-religionists, and from this is forced to consider and decide what is awaiting himself. No kingdom in Europe is still as free as the Crown of Sweden, but this misery is daily approaching and gaining strength day by day.<sup>84</sup>

Sweden needed its friends, we said, since, if there were no states like it, it would be far less clear which kind of a country Sweden in fact was. Hence if these friends were threatened, so was the Swedes' conception of themselves.

Curiously enough, however, the designated objects of these concerns



were often less than grateful for the attention paid to them, and while Sweden was on very good terms with the Evangelical entity when understood as an abstract notion, relations with the *actually existing* Protestant states were always highly problematic. On the diplomatic level misunderstandings and disagreements succeeded one another. Despite repeated attempts throughout the 1620s to form some kind of an anti-Habsburg alliance, Sweden's role in these projects was always controversial and Denmark, Holland and England always seemed to prefer another solution than the one advocated by the Swedish king. The Protestant princes in Germany reacted in a similar fashion. Much as they feared the growing Catholic influence, they seem to have feared the consequences of a Swedish intervention even more. They did *not* want the Swedes to come to their rescue, and when the Swedes eventually did, no German prince came forward to support them.

In fact, as soon as relations with fellow Protestants were discussed in these concrete terms the Swedes also became suspicious. 'The mood among the burghers in Stralsund cannot to be trusted', the king told the chancellor in December 1628, and 'our garrison is not sufficiently strong to prevail in the event of some trouble'.<sup>85</sup> The burghers in Danzig are notoriously untrustworthy, the chancellor reported to the king in February 1630; 'you know the mood of those people, especially the merchants'.<sup>86</sup> 'The Danes are jealous of our success and would seize the first opportunity to take advantage of us'; 'the Dutch are more dangerous than the Austrians since they are stronger at sea'.<sup>87</sup> 'If we do not intervene', the members of the Council put it in October 1629, our German friends will 'start to despair, become accustomed to the Papist yoke, begin co-operating with them, giving them strength and doing us damage'.<sup>88</sup>

On occasion Sweden even had to make war on its fellow Evangelicals, and although Gustav Adolf went ahead with these wars, they did require some kind of a justification. In a proclamation to the Norwegians during the war with Denmark in 1611, for example, Gustav Adolf regretted that he had to turn his weapons

not against some idolatrous or heathen or barbarian lord and nation, nor against the pope in Rome and his gang, but against the land and people which share with us in the Christian faith and religion, and to this extent give our detractors and religious enemies a reason to rejoice over our discord.<sup>89</sup>

For a country with such a lot of friends, Sweden was strangely alone.

Next let us turn to the enemies made by the Swedes. For Gustav Adolf personally, and thus also for his country, the main enemy would always remain

Sigismund, the Polish king. It was Sigismund who had a claim on the Swedish throne and Sigismund who would fight all his life to regain it. In order to reject these claims and rally the people behind his 'regiment', Gustav Adolf constantly returned to the need for unity: you are one people, he repeated in one speech after another, not the inhabitants of this or that region; you have one purpose and one and only one legitimate ruler.<sup>90</sup> Conversely, *disunity* was the one big threat, and whenever any form of discord threatened, the king was quick to react. Gustav Adolf was convinced that Sigismund had spies in the highest of places and that his men were proselytising on behalf of the Catholic church and secretly preparing the Swedish peasants for a revolt. Thus when the Polish peace negotiators in 1627 demanded the right for Polish subjects to travel freely in Sweden, the king immediately became suspicious. 'As far as the travel in Sweden of the king of Poland and his gang is concerned', he reported to the Diet in 1627, 'we fully notice that they through this means would find an occasion to destroy our internal unity (whereupon next to God our welfare and freedom and salvation depend)'.<sup>91</sup>

In the stories which Gustav Adolf told about the enemy, the characterisation of his cousin easily blended with the portraits of the Catholic church and the Habsburg emperor. By the end of the 1620s, according to the king, all wars were mixed together and all enemies the same: Sigismund was an *avfälling*, a 'proselyte', who had betrayed the traditions of the Vasa family and made himself unfit for the Swedish 'regiment'; papism was a 'yoke', a 'heresy' and a perversion of the 'true word of God'; the emperor was a 'tyrant' and the ruler of a centralised Catholic power aspiring to 'universal *monarchia*'. The official propaganda never missed an opportunity to stress these connections:

What can we expect from king Sigismundo, who not only is evil himself but who also lets himself be governed by a devilish party of Jesuits who have been the cause of the terrifying tyranny in Spain, France and other places?<sup>92</sup>

Sigismund was not to be trusted since he was a Catholic; the Catholic church was scheming to regain control over Sweden; the emperor and his men were making plans for a military invasion.

During the last years of the 1620s, the threat posed by the military advances of the Habsburg armies was interpreted through a number of related metaphors. The enemy was approaching like an unstoppable natural force, the king maintained; like a 'stone', or like 'waves', they were rolling towards Sweden crushing everything in their way.<sup>93</sup> The relevance of the wave-metaphor is best understood if seen in the context of another favourite seventeenth-century image: the state understood as a 'ship'. If the

state was a 'ship' with the king as its 'captain' and the people as its 'crew', then a war could be thought of as a 'storm' on the 'ocean' which the ship was crossing.<sup>94</sup> Hence the Catholics were the waves that threatened to overturn the ship of state. 'As one wave follows upon the other, thus the Papist League is coming closer to us . . .', the king declared before the Diet,<sup>95</sup> and in his letter to the members of the Council of 30 November 1628 Axel Oxenstierna asked

the one to strengthen and admonish the other to help and support, as in a general calamity and emergency at sea, not seeing to what each *in privato* can throw over-board, but only to save life, honour, wife, children and *patriam* and *republicam*.<sup>96</sup>

Regardless of the metaphor invoked, however, there was no doubt regarding the seriousness of the threat involved. The Holy Roman Empire was not, after all, a state like others, and on the world stage it played a very special role.<sup>97</sup> In the early seventeenth century people still widely believed themselves to live in the 'Roman age', that is, in the age of the last of the four world empires whose final demise would bring about the return of Christ and the end of the world.<sup>98</sup> For this reason alone it seemed a Swedish war against this particular enemy was not to be taken lightly. More concretely, the Biblical injunction against rebellion – Jesus asking the Pharisees to 'render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's' – seemed to apply to the Habsburgs with particular force.<sup>99</sup> Since the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire counted themselves as successors to the Roman emperors, it could be argued that the Viennese *Caesar* was the very same *Caesar* as the one to whom Jesus had referred. And if this was the case, it seemed very difficult indeed to justify the action the Swedes were contemplating. King Gustav Adolf and his teacher Johan Skytte touched upon this issue in the Council meeting of 27 October 1629.

*Skyttius*: It would be against God and conscience to attempt the overthrow of the monarchy.

*Respondet Rex*: All monarchies have passed from one family to another: the Gallic monarchy from an Italian family to a Gallic, and from this one to a Frankish. The Roman has passed from one to the other among one hundred families.<sup>100</sup>

Here Skytte invoked the old, medieval, view of the world based on the pre-eminence of the empire, whereas Gustav Adolf defended the new, modern, view of the world based on the pre-eminence of the state. In fact, when making his case in these terms, the king closely followed a line of reasoning developed by Hugo Grotius, the Dutch legal scholar, only a few years earlier.<sup>101</sup> The Roman *monarchia*, Grotius had argued, is subject to the same vicissitudes of time and place as all other political regimes; the Imperial throne has no special status since it, just as all other thrones, can be both

won and lost. Although the idea of the emperor, his *persona ficta*, is unassailable, the actually existing emperor, his *persona actuale*, can indeed be attacked without serious eschatological consequences.

Even as this conclusion was established, however, the possibility still remained that the emperor could be defended with the help of a more up-to-date – more Protestant – line of reasoning. According to Martin Luther, popular resistance against a secular ruler was always contrary to the teachings of the Bible, but if this was the case, what, if anything, gave the German Evangelicals a right to rebel, and what gave Sweden a right to support them? In their deliberations on this issue, the Swedes explored a chink in the Lutheran dogma. While Luther had indeed argued that insurrection was a crime, he had, as a result of persecutions against his own followers, accepted that there also were cases where resistance could be permitted. In particular this concerned situations where a prince persecuted his or her own subjects for the sake of their religious beliefs.<sup>102</sup> Or, put in the vocabulary of the time: an armed rebellion was permitted whenever the subjects confronted a 'tyrant'. Hence we should not be surprised that the number of 'tyrants' had a tendency to grow in proportion to the number of insurrections engaged in, and as we might expect, the members of the Vasa family – always bent on rebellion – were almost always confronted with a ruler of precisely this kind. The Danish king Kristian II, whom Gustav Vasa had overthrown in the 1520s, was in Sweden consistently referred to as 'Kristian the Tyrant', and when count Karl rallied support for his revolt against Sigismund he was defending the country against the 'tyranny of the Papists'.<sup>103</sup> In line with this family tradition, Gustav Adolf often warned his subjects against the reimposition of the 'Catholic tyranny' or the 'tyranny of the body and soul', and when the Swedes went to war in 1630 they naturally did so against the 'Habsburg tyranny' in Germany.

In the Swedish propaganda the Habsburgs were not only tyrants, however, but also the rulers of an empire which comprised many different cultures, religions and peoples. As such it was easily compared to that infamous empire of classical antiquity: 'Babylon'. 'The yoke of Babylon is again weighing the Germans down', the king reported in a *bönedagsplakat* in 1623.<sup>104</sup> Just like Babylon, in other words, the Habsburg empire was a *cosmopolis*, a random collection of various peoples governed by a single despotic ruler. This description of the enemy naturally turned on the use of the term *polis*, which pointed to the fact that Sweden – unlike Babylon, but just like classical Athens – consisted of free men who ruled themselves. At the same time, however, 'Babylon' was also a synonym for decadence and depravity, and when Martin Luther had called the pope the 'whore of Babylon' it was the debauchery and vice of the clergy he had had in mind.<sup>105</sup>

As applied to the Habsburgs, the reverberations of the Babylon metaphor thus came to indicate not only that the enemy was morally perverted, but also that he was lacking in that manly power which Machiavelli had called *virtù* – and as we said above, in the Renaissance a lack of manliness could have very concrete political implications. In other words, the Holy Roman Empire was not only cosmopolitan, despotic, unfree and depraved, but also deficient in that one quality which could give a prince control over his or her own fate. In all these respects Sweden and its king were radical contrasts. As a *polis* Sweden was united behind its ruler, free to act as it wanted and also free of debauchery and vice. In addition, king Gustav Adolf had fortune on his side by virtue of his manliness, since, as Machiavelli had explained, Fortuna, like all women, is ‘a friend to the young, because they are less cautious, fiercer, and master her with greater audacity’.<sup>106</sup>

### Playing by the rules

Above we discussed how the men and women who gathered at the princely courts sought to fashion new identities for themselves. The Renaissance, I argued, was simultaneously a time of exceptional poetic creativity and a time of conventionalism and self-discipline; the very same people who took such pride in their powers of self-creation quickly and voluntarily subjected themselves to the coercive rules of *la courtoisie*. A parallel process of self-fashioning took place at the inter-state level, we said. Through the reconceptualisation of space and the rejection of the universalistic claims of the church and the empire, the world was turned into a stage where sovereign princes, personifying their countries, increasingly came to be regarded as the only legitimate actors. Yet not every ruler could lay claim to this new title; not all of Europe’s colourful collection of counts, viscounts, bishops, archbishops, margraves, palsgraves, landgraves, grand-dukes and arch-dukes was a legitimate actor. Before he or she could join the performance, each prince first had to be recognised by the already established princes as their equal and treated with due honour and respect. To this end various codes of conduct were developed in relations between states also, and those princes who told the most fancy stories about their countries also came to submit themselves to the demands of the new conventions. In the Renaissance two such main sets of rules emerged: the body of international law and the code which regulated diplomatic conduct.

The break-down of the authority of universal institutions and the emergence of sovereign states posed new challenges both to political leaders and to political thinkers. The concept of sovereignty implied a new freedom of



action, but as one prince exercised this new freedom, the similar freedom of other princes soon came to be jeopardised, and as a result international violence and disorder increased dramatically. In order to regulate inter-state affairs, an increasing number of scholars turned to inter-state law for help. By making the prince its legal subject, this body of law simultaneously denied the same status both to supra- and to sub-national actors – to the pope and the emperor, on the one hand, and to local feudal lords, on the other. The *jus gentium intra se*, the law of peoples within the state, was replaced by the *jus gentium inter se*, the law of peoples between states.

A particularly important area of regulation concerned war, and a particularly vexing problem concerned the relationship between war and justice. For medieval writers who had discussed this issue – St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas among others – the intellectual task had always been to come up with a justification for wars waged by Christian princes against heathens and infidels. Given that good necessarily had to defend itself against evil, and that God had to fight Satan, this had never been very difficult to do.<sup>107</sup> The problem faced by the jurists of the Renaissance was, however, much more formidable. How were they to arbitrate between the claims of princes who all called themselves Christian? What could they say about wars that were not holy crusades, but simply instruments of everyday statecraft? Was it still, in this modern context, possible to talk about some of these wars as 'just' and others as 'unjust'? During the course of the sixteenth century a number of writers provided their own answers to these questions, but the most influential statement was provided by Hugo Grotius, whose *De jure belli ac pacis*, 'On the Law of War and Peace', was published in 1625.<sup>108</sup>

According to Grotius, relations between states should be based on the law of natural reason; if only man's inherent rationality was allowed to prevail, a viable international legal order could be established and peace assured. As he admitted, however, there are also situations in which wars have to be fought and when they can be fought justly. Grotius identified three such cases. A war is just, first of all, if it is fought *in defensio* of one's own country – or the country of one's friends – when it is unjustly attacked. Here the threat may be actual or merely imminent, but a defensive war cannot be fought justly in anticipation of threats which are merely potential.<sup>109</sup> Secondly, a just war can be fought *in recuperatio*, in order to recover property of which one has been illegally deprived. Finally, it can be fought *in poena*, in order to inflict punishment upon a state that has already violated the law. Wars which are *not* allowed, on the other hand, are those fought for the personal power, possessions, or glory of the prince or wars fought in order to spread Christianity.<sup>110</sup> In addition, the prince should



ideally not only have a *causa justa* for going to war, but also an *intentio recta*. That is, he or she should not only fight the war for a just cause, but also fight it with the precise personal intention of bringing about that end which makes it just. Yet Grotius realised that this last requirement was probably too stringent, and demanded instead that even princes who had valid reasons for their wars should first do their utmost to seek peaceful settlements.<sup>111</sup>

In Grotius' version of it, international law was the law of the state, we said, and as such it was naturally opposed to the prerogatives of other, traditional, authorities. Consequently, a prince who read Grotius' lists of stipulations would learn not only which actions were pre- or proscribed, but also which arguments could be used in rejecting the claims of these rival authorities. In the Renaissance, in other words, international law was *not*, as it was later to become, merely a question of defending an international 'morality' against the immoral conduct of individual states. More importantly, international law defined what a state *was* and it supplied the sovereign princes with the arguments they needed in order to defend their own positions.<sup>112</sup> To be a legitimate member of inter-state society was to be subject to inter-state law.

Although not all princes actually paid attention to these rules, they were clearly important to those princes who sought to gain membership in international society, and a state which was yet to be recognised as a legitimate actor was likely to be a particularly conscientious ruler-follower. This, at least, was the case of Sweden. King Gustav Adolf took a strong personal interest in matters of law and he was an avid reader of legal treaties. According to reports, he spent some time every day 'studying ancient and modern authorities on the subject', and especially 'the work of Grotius, and in particular his tractatus *De jure belli ac pacis*'.<sup>113</sup> The king, we are told, 'always carried his Grotius with him'; he was said to rest his head on the book at night, to keep it in his saddle bag during the day, and a copy of the treatise was found in the royal tent after his death.<sup>114</sup>

Given this keen interest on the part of the king, it is not surprising that the discussions which preceded the intervention were filled with references to Grotius. As we saw, the king, the chancellor, and in particular the members of the Council, constantly concerned themselves with the question of how to make the intervention appear as just 'in the eyes of the world'. To this end good legal arguments were needed and the *inventio* function of the Council debates was to make sure that these arguments were discovered. In particular it was important to show that all peaceful means had been exhausted before the country resorted to war. An offensive action in Germany is undoubtedly our best option, Gabriel Gustavsson Oxenstierna

declared on 3 November 1629, 'but for our cause to be all the more just in the eyes of the world . . . it would be best if we simultaneously also sought [to resolve the conflict through] peaceful means'.<sup>115</sup> Similar considerations guided the discussions regarding Swedish aid to the beleaguered city of Stralsund. As Grotius had argued, it was never the duty of a neutral country to be perfectly impartial between two warring parties since it was impossible to remain neutral in a conflict between justice and injustice. Instead it was the duty of those who kept out of a war 'to do nothing whereby he who supports a wicked cause may be rendered more powerful, or whereby the movements of him who wages a just war may be hampered'.<sup>116</sup> This so-called 'doctrine of qualified neutrality' provided the rationale which the king relied on in defending Swedish assistance to Stralsund in his letter to the German princes.

Grotius' doctrine of non-intervention did, however, present a major obstacle to the action which the Swedes contemplated.<sup>117</sup> Since Grotius was a staunch defender of the sovereign authority of the prince, he categorically refused to grant the people the right to rebel. Neither domestic nor international order could be maintained, he claimed, if sovereignty was undermined.<sup>118</sup> That common man was denied this right did not, however, mean that *other* princes in *other* countries were similarly constrained. Although each prince primarily had a responsibility *vis-à-vis* his or her own subjects, each prince also had a responsibility *vis-à-vis* humankind at large, and whenever atrocities were committed against a people, only foreign princes could take up arms on their behalf.<sup>119</sup> This, Grotius added, was particularly the case if the people in question were persecuted for their religious beliefs.<sup>120</sup> As we might expect this was an argument which particularly appealed to the Swedes, and as we saw, frequent references were made to it in the Council debates.

To be a legitimate Renaissance state and a legitimate Renaissance prince was also, however, to be subject to the rules which governed diplomatic conduct. Very much like the stipulations of international law, the rules of diplomacy provided mechanisms through which relations between states could be regulated and conflicts solved, but in addition they provided a standard by which membership in inter-state society could be determined. To be a Renaissance prince was both to judge oneself and to be judged by others in terms of this elaborate code.

In the Middle Ages relations between states had been regulated primarily through the occasional institution of the *legatus*, the legation that was dispatched to a foreign court or to a church council for a particular purpose and a limited period of time.<sup>121</sup> As interaction between states increased,

however, more regular channels of communication were needed, and soon the legations began to reside on a permanent basis in the foreign capitals to which they had been assigned. The first such permanent ambassador was dispatched from the court of Milan to Genoa in 1455, and soon other Italian city-states adopted the same practice, as did an increasing number of non-Italian states, and during the course of the following century resident *corps diplomatiques* were set up in London, Paris and Vienna.<sup>122</sup> When connected through this diplomatic network, princes could act and react to each other much more quickly than ever before. As interdependence increased, however, mistrust and insecurity increased with it, but there was also a shared commitment to the reciprocity of the new arrangements. It turned out to be to every one's advantage to give ambassadors diplomatic immunity, to provide them with channels for communicating with their home courts and to grant extra-territorial rights to their embassies.<sup>123</sup>

Another diplomatic institution of particular importance was the inter-state congress which gradually came to replace the church councils as the forum in which representatives of different princes could gather to discuss affairs of common interest.<sup>124</sup> After each major war, a congress assembled in order to negotiate the terms of the peace and to decide on the principles through which future European affairs were to be organised. Among the many such assemblies held during the course of the seventeenth century, those of Prague, Westphalia, Utrecht and Nijmegen were the most important.

When compared to developments on the European continent, Swedish diplomatic practices developed late and only slowly. In the sixteenth century, Swedish kings still relied on the same channels of communication as during medieval days: they sent letters to foreign princes, dispatched temporary legations or arranged meetings with their neighbours at the common border. And while Gustav Adolf also continued to send letters and organise border meetings – and while the Council, as we saw, spent much time discussing which diplomatic missions to send and which not to send – these *ad hoc* arrangements were by the early seventeenth century quite insufficient. A first step towards a more permanent representation abroad was taken in 1614 when Holland and Sweden exchanged ambassadors, and a second step was taken in 1618 when Axel Oxenstierna established a royal bureau exclusively in charge of relations with foreign courts. Sweden exchanged ambassadors with Denmark and France in the 1620s and 1630s, and Oxenstierna developed a wide network of foreign agents through whom information could be gathered at foreign courts.<sup>125</sup>

It is important to notice that the diplomatic practices of the Renaissance not only constituted a structure of institutions, but also a specific code of

behaviour. A diplomat was a personal envoy which one prince dispatched to another prince, and as such he was the prince's representative in the social life at the foreign court.<sup>126</sup> The diplomat, we could say, was a performer on the stage of the court where he was stationed, and once diplomats came to be understood in this fashion all their conduct was soon recast in theatrical form. This dramaturgy was never more obvious than when an ambassador was given a formal reception by a prince; when he was, as it were, given an 'audience'. On these occasions the prince was seated on the throne, equipped with the royal regalia and surrounded by courtiers arranged according to the rules of precedence, and the ambassador approached, giving bows and compliments in all directions, introducing himself as well as the prince who had sent him. Yet while such an audience was a performance on the stage of the court, it was simultaneously also a performance on the stage of the world: the role which a diplomat played before a prince was a perfect analogical equivalent of the role played by the prince before other princes. The recognition which the diplomat received from the prince and the courtiers during an audience thus always reflected the *diplomatic* recognition accorded to the prince and the country he or she represented.<sup>127</sup>

Since the stage of the world and the stage of the court were intimately connected in this manner, whatever happened on the one stage immediately had repercussions for whatever happened on the other. As a result the requirements of *la diplomatie* soon came to merge with the intricate rules of *la courtoisie* and questions of social etiquette and manners suddenly became matters of paramount political importance. If you wanted to be taken seriously as a prince among others it was essential that you ensure that your personal representatives were familiar with the rules of precedence and decorum.<sup>128</sup> Naturally this made the diplomats very sensitive regarding matters pertaining to their status, honour and reputation, and even the most trivial misunderstandings could give rise to serious conflicts.<sup>129</sup> This was particularly the case at an international congress. When the representatives of all princes were gathered in the same room on the same occasion, extreme care had to be exercised in order not to antagonise or offend. The way the delegations were seated, their order of precedence, the way they were addressed, determined who counted and for how much. Endless squabbles over these issues characterised the congresses of Westphalia and Nijmegen, and as a result the peace negotiations often stalled.<sup>130</sup>

The intricate rules of *la diplomatie* naturally took on special importance for a king and a country whose role on the world stage was contested, and as we might expect, questions of diplomatic protocol were matters of

serious concerns to the Swedes. Whenever he was absent from the country, king Gustav Adolf made sure to leave very detailed instructions to the Council regarding how best to receive any foreign legation that might appear at the court, and when he knew beforehand that a particular envoy was to be expected, he never failed to instruct the Council to 'give the legation accommodation in good quarters, to treat them well and according to custom'.<sup>131</sup> This should be done, he said, 'for the sake of friendship and in order to keep the neighbour devoted to us and for the sake of the reputation of the country'.<sup>132</sup>

Since questions of appearance were important in diplomatic affairs, the young Swedish state could not afford not to look its best. Looking one's best could itself be very expensive, however, and the costs involved in diplomatic entertainments were a constant source of worry to the Swedish leaders. In fact, the prohibitive cost associated with the trip to Vienna was mentioned in the Council discussions as a reason against sending a peace delegation to the emperor. Not only would such a mission require men and horses and sufficient resources to entertain foreign officials and diplomats once they arrived in the Austrian capital, but they would also have to be presentable at the many German courts which they were bound to visit on the way.<sup>133</sup>

### **Fighting for recognition**

Our alternative explanation of the Swedish intervention is almost complete, yet the most important piece in the jigsaw puzzle is still missing. In order to find it, let us first quickly put together all the other pieces we have gathered and look at the pattern that emerges.

The Renaissance was a formative moment, I began, in which old, taken-for-granted, meanings broke down and new ones were established in their place. These new meanings allowed new stories to be told and new identities to be created. As a result two new subjects were born: man and the state. The men and women of the Renaissance were creatures who believed they could fashion their own selves at will and become persons of their own choice. Similarly the Renaissance state was a political entity ruled by a prince who claimed to be sovereign and who acknowledged the power of no rival authorities. Both man and the state were actors: Renaissance man acted on the stage of the court, and through the person of the prince, the Renaissance state acted on the stage of the world. As actors both man and state were obliged to follow the rules of the plays in which they participated. Man was subjected to the constraining conventions of life at the court, and the state subjected to the new sets of rules of international law and diplo-



macy through which inter-court affairs were regulated. As actors both man and state faced audiences who had the power to judge them and to grant or withhold approval of their performances. In the end, an individual could only become an accepted member of high society if he or she was recognised as such by those who already belonged there, and a prince could only become a legitimate actor if he or she was recognised as such both by his or her own subjects and by the assembly of other, already recognised, princes.

The Swedish state which emerged during the course of the sixteenth century was a political entity with only a rather vague resemblance to the states on the European continent. Pent up in a remote corner of the stage, Sweden played no role in European politics; the country was too poor in man-power, financial and other resources, and totally lacking in past achievements, cultural heritage or heroic deeds. The country simply did not matter. Not surprisingly, the claims of its rulers were often difficult to judge by the princes in the rest of Europe. This was particularly the case since dynastic struggles continuously undermined the position of each new king: after two consecutive *coups d'état* and perpetual feuds within the ruling family, it was highly unclear with what right the present king occupied the throne. In fact when Gustav II Adolf came to power in 1611 his position corresponded very closely to that of the 'new prince' which Machiavelli had described. Just like the ruler of many an Italian principality, Gustav Adolf had been thrust into power by a combination of sheer coincidence and military fortune, and just like these rulers, his main preoccupation would always remain how to consolidate his political power and how to gain recognition for himself and his 'regiment'.

Through the constitutive stories told by the king before both domestic and foreign audiences he sought to fashion a Sweden which had a presence in both time and space; a country which was internally united and of which he himself was the sole legitimate ruler. As far as the time dimension was concerned these stories were highly extravagant. Sweden, the king argued, had been founded after the Flood by the grandson of Noah and it was hence not only the oldest country in the world, but also the country with the most glorious achievements to its name. In addition, Sweden was a Protestant state and as such independent both of Rome and of the political authority of the Catholic church. A Protestant Sweden was also a country which occupied a very definite place in an affective geography. It had its friends and its enemies: the community of other Protestant states, on the one hand, and Sigismund and the papists, on the other. A Protestant Sweden, the king affirmed, was a country united behind himself and in opposition to his Polish cousin. Yet king Gustav Adolf was not only a good



teller of stories, but also a conscientious follower of the rules that regulated relations between courts. The king and his advisers spent an enormous amount of time worrying about the stipulations of international law as well as the requirements of diplomatic etiquette. It was very important to them to be recognised as none other than that kind of actor to whom these two sets of rules applied.

If we add all this up, we find a king who very actively – yet at the same time also very anxiously – sought to establish an identity for himself and his country. Gustav Adolf was, we could say, presenting requests for recognition addressed to each of the two audiences he was facing. The message to the domestic audience was short and laconic: 'Be faithful and obedient to my regiment!' 'Pay your taxes!' 'Stay united and beware of factions!' The message addressed to the foreigners was just as succinct, yet here the firm language just barely concealed the insecurity of the performer: 'Recognise me and my country as a legitimate actor on the world stage!'; 'A prince and a country equal to all others and worthy of the same treatment and the same respect!'

As far as the domestic audiences were concerned, they did – with some notable exceptions – grant the recognition the king requested. The peasants continued to rebel to be sure, but these uprisings were always limited in scope and always easily contained. In fact the king's skilful rhetorical strategy paid remarkably high dividends. In the Council of the Realm, the aristocrats were invited to common deliberations, allowed to speak their mind, and then co-opted by the king; and in the Diet, the peasants, burghers and clergy were allowed to take an active part in the decision-making process, yet only as parts of the body politic which the king himself was heading. The Swedish subjects were never entirely faithful to the 'regiment', never particularly happy to pay their taxes, and never fully united or obedient, but what mattered in the end was that they should be faithful, happy, united and obedient *enough*. And that, by and large, they were. The only real problem for the king was how that other audience was going to react: time now to discuss the reactions of the foreign princes and to explain why Sweden went to war in 1630.

It would not be difficult to write the history of Sweden from the year 1521 to the year 1630 as a story of continuous insults, slights and humiliations directed against the country and its kings. Ever since Gustav Vasa's rejection of the Nordic Union, the Danish kings had used every opportunity, and all their influence with foreign courts, to humiliate Sweden and the Vasa house. One early source of conflict concerned the 'Three Crowns', the coat of arms of the medieval Scandinavian triple monarchy, which Gustav

Vasa continued to use as a Swedish symbol, much to the dismay of the Danes. Given the analogical *episteme* of the Renaissance, this issue was no trifling matter: a coat of arms established a lineage for a ruler and gave a 'name' to a family or a country. By using the emblem of the Scandinavian kingdom the Swedes effectively laid claims to all the authority and prestige accumulated under this sign. The 'Three Crowns Affair' continued to be discussed throughout the sixteenth century and in attempts to settle the issue a number of embassies were dispatched to Copenhagen and received in Stockholm. Since the Swedish kings refused to give in, however, nothing ever came of these negotiations, and the issue of the Three Crowns was even mentioned as one of the *causae belli* when war broke out between the two countries in 1563. When Karl IX came to power in the year 1600, the question had still not been settled, and the Danes stubbornly refused to recognise the new ruler as long as he did not drop at least two of the three crowns.<sup>134</sup>

The continuous dynastic struggles that destabilised Sweden at the end of the sixteenth century only added to these difficulties. At the time of Gustav Adolf's accession to the throne, his cousin Sigismund still regarded himself – and was widely regarded by Catholic states on the continent – as the only legitimate Swedish ruler. The Danes still did their utmost to discredit the Vasa kings, and other Protestant rulers were, as we have seen, highly suspicious of a man whom they in many respects regarded as little but an usurper.<sup>135</sup> When letters arrived in Stockholm from foreign courts addressed not to 'Gustav Adolf, king of Sweden', but instead to 'Gustav Adolf, duke of Finland' or 'Gustavus the Swede', the message could not be misinterpreted: Gustav Adolf was not, these foreign princes pointed out, the man he claimed to be.<sup>136</sup> Gustav Adolf, we are told, refused to open these letters, no doubt since to do so would have meant to accept the humiliation.

The insecure position of the country and its king made the Swedish leaders very conscious of themselves and, as we saw above, it turned questions of appearance and standing into political issues of paramount importance. Regardless of the topic and the circumstances, there was always a reputational aspect to be considered, and this was nowhere more obvious than in the discussions regarding the German war. 'If we do not go across', the members of the Council argued, 'we will lose all reputation and the blessing of God'; if we are to come to a settlement 'with reputation and honour, we must meet him with an army in his own land'.<sup>137</sup> If we do not go offensively into Germany, we will have to leave Prussia 'with "disreputation" and damage', and if we dismiss the German mercenaries, it will be to our "disreputation" before Wallenstein and the foreigners'.<sup>138</sup> You

have shown great ability in concluding this treaty with the Poles, the king complimented the chancellor; it has served 'my reputation and that of the fatherland'.<sup>139</sup>

Again we find the personal fortunes of the king intimately linked with those of the country. The king needed reputation to maintain his *status* and only in this way would he be able to guarantee peace and prosperity for his state.<sup>140</sup> Just as for the courtiers acting on the stage of the court, a reputation was the social capital which allowed a prince on the stage of the world to perform his various roles with conviction and force. In fact it is striking how often a concern for *reputatio* was treated together with a concern for *securitas*. As the Swedish leaders repeatedly made clear, not only the security of the country was at stake in dealing with the Habsburgs, but also – and at the same time and in the same measure – its reputation.<sup>141</sup> At the meeting of the Council on 3 November 1629, for example, the members affirmed that

the reasons *pro offensioe* were more correct, namely that nothing could be more beneficial to the security, reputation and final peace of the fatherland, than the sooner the better to go across with as much might as the country can spare and *animose* to attack the emperor in Germany.<sup>142</sup>

Yet as Gustav Adolf repeatedly stressed, this concern for reputation was something very different from the 'vaine-glory' which early-seventeenth-century political theorists had usually outlawed as a valid reason for war.<sup>143</sup> What the king sought was not the glory which comes from empty praise, but instead the kind of confidence which comes from a proper appreciation of one's own actions. 'I only consider what is best for the *patria*', he pointed out to the members of the Council on 3 November 1629, 'and I hope that no other motive will be imputed to me'. The outcome of war is always uncertain and '*satur sum gloriae, ut ampliore non petam* [I am full of glory and seek none bigger]. *Ergo* you cannot say that I seek for *vanam gloriam*'.<sup>144</sup>

As we said in our discussion of Machiavelli above, questions regarding reputation were in the Renaissance always intimately connected to a special kind of energy or resolve. And as the Swedish leaders affirmed, wars should be 'gone against' and enemies attacked offensively and *animose*; to passively await whatever outcomes *Ms Fortuna* had in store was *not* the way to gain *reputatio* for oneself, and if *reputatio* could not be assured neither, in the end, could *securitas*. Only by taking one's fate in one's own hands – only through manly *virtù* – could security and reputation simultaneously be guaranteed. Naturally this Machiavellian lesson applied with particular force to a 'new prince' such as Gustav Adolf and it is consequently not surprising that the figure of *Fortuna* frequently appeared in the iconography

associated with the king. On wood-block prints which were distributed on the continent in 1632, for example, we see Gustav Adolf riding through Germany in a triumphal procession accompanied by allegorical figures symbolising the virtues and the graces. On the king's side is Fortuna Audax, a goddess whose presence stressed the maxim that fortune always is on the side of the bold and the fearless.<sup>145</sup>

Despite these efforts, however, the foreign audiences remained difficult to impress. In fact both declared enemies and alleged friends reacted in a similar, and equally negative, fashion. As far as the friends were concerned, the Swedes approached them throughout the 1620s with a number of suggestions for common projects, military alliances and diplomatic co-operation. Already in 1617 Gustav Adolf dispatched Johan Skytte to various Protestant princes in Germany in order to discuss the possibility of an anti-Catholic front. Later in the 1620s, the king offered to contribute Swedish troops to a joint Protestant force, and for a while negotiations were held with Holland regarding a financial contribution to the Swedish campaign. When it came down to it, however, no foreign prince was willing to grant the Swedish king the role of supreme commander of a combined, Protestant, army, and nobody wanted to risk their money on his uncertain military schemes.<sup>146</sup> Yet, despite these persistent failures, Gustav Adolf continued his diplomatic efforts right up to the intervention itself; the members of the Council continued to list the possibility of foreign assistance in the *pro* columns of their protocols, and the letters exchanged between the king and the chancellor often spoke of the possibility of concluding a treaty with some foreign prince or another. In the end, however, all such hopes were in vain. When the Swedish troops landed in Germany they had neither financial nor military support from any other quarter.

The attitude of the German princes is highly significant in this regard. In October 1629, Gustav Adolf approached Georg Wilhelm, the prince of Brandenburg, who was a Protestant and in addition also Gustav Adolf's own father-in-law. But as Georg Wilhelm made clear, any co-operation with the Swedes would jeopardise his relations with the emperor, and furthermore he did not want to invite a Swedish army which would set up camp on his land and feed off its resources.<sup>147</sup> As we saw, Johann Georg, the Elector of Saxony, reacted in a very similar fashion. When Gustav Adolf's emissary approached him, he declared that, although he himself was a Protestant, he would be forced to side with the emperor and the empire in the event of a Swedish attack. The format in which the discussions between Sweden and Saxony were carried out is highly revealing of the German stance. At first Johann Georg refused to even answer the letters that Gustav

Adolf sent him, and when, despite repeated efforts, there was still no response, a Swedish diplomat was dispatched to Dresden, the Saxon capital. When he arrived he was, however, refused an official audience at the court, and instead Johann Georg agreed to meet him secretly at night in the royal stable.<sup>148</sup> The significance of this breach of diplomatic protocol could not have been missed by anyone back in Stockholm: the nocturnal reception among the horses was a mock audience, very far removed from the dazzling stage of the court.

More than anything, however, it was the repeated insults of Sweden's enemies that finally settled the issue – the failure of the Catholic powers to recognise Sweden as an equal among other countries and king Gustav Adolf as its legitimate ruler. 'Why and from what cause is it', the king had asked the estates of the Diet when they gathered for their meeting of 1625, 'that our realm and fatherland by so many and so often is attacked and sought after?' The only reason I can find, he said,

is that we cannot carry out our enterprises which the same strength and power as other nations and peoples, and this causes disrespect and contempt from our neighbours, so that they argue that we count for very little and become ready to suppress and dominate us.<sup>149</sup>

The king's reasoning is clear: we have not shown ourselves as strong as other nations and our reputation has suffered as a result; we have been treated with disrespect by foreigners and exposed ourselves to all the whims and capriciousness of fortune. Our enemies will dominate and suppress us unless we act in a manly and resolute fashion.

The prime example of such a disrespectful enemy was of course Sigismund. Although peace negotiations with Poland continued throughout the last years of the 1620s, they always ran into the same insurmountable procedural difficulty: the Polish negotiators refused to grant Gustav Adolf the title of 'king of Sweden', and since the letters of attorney which the Swedish diplomats presented were therefore incorrectly addressed, they could not be accepted by the Poles and negotiations could not begin. But even once a formula was found which broke this dead-lock, the Polish king continued to make what Gustav Adolf regarded as a series of outrageous demands. Sigismund asked for the return of his Swedish throne, if not immediately, at least upon Gustav Adolf's death; he wanted compensation for the property he had lost; the right for his men to travel freely in Sweden; and a substantial Swedish contribution to the dowry of his daughter. When he heard these requests Gustav Adolf was not slow to take offence. 'Is it not the case', he asked in his report to the Diet, 'that the Swedish common man has other and more useful things to do than to be bothered with the dowry



and trousseau of foreign misses and especially those of our worst enemy?'<sup>150</sup> What Gustav Adolf demanded in turn was easily expressed:

1. That Sigismund, his children and descendants, renounce all claims and rights of inheritance to the Crown of Sweden and the provinces under it.
2. That Sigismund, his children and descendants as well as the Crown and Estates of Poland, recognise (*will erkenna*) His Royal Majesty and hold him as the ruler. The fact that God in his fatherly compassion has ordained [Gustav Adolf] as the lawful lord and heir to the Swedish realm has already been recognised by the emperor, by all foreign princes and republics in the whole world.
3. That the king in Poland, his children and descendants, as well as the Estates and the Polish Crown will recognise and admit (*wille erkänna och bekenna*) that the realm of Sweden, and all its inhabitants, are free and released from all the obligations that they previously had to king Sigismund (free and released as they are in themselves, and as they are held and considered by all other nations which surround them and with which they want to remain on friendly terms).<sup>151</sup>

Gustav Adolf thus demanded that Sigismund would recognise him as the legitimate Swedish ruler – a recognition, he said, already granted by God as well as by the emperor and all other foreign princes and republics. If Sigismund wanted a peaceful settlement, he simply had to renounce his outrageous claims, while a failure of recognition, on the other hand, would mean war.

Although Gustav Adolf in January of 1627 thus appeared very confident regarding the recognition already granted him by the emperor, subsequent events would show that he had fundamentally misunderstood the Austrian position. Although until 1627 there had been very few contacts between Sweden and the Habsburgs, this changed as the Swedish armies gradually advanced towards the south and the Austrian armies gradually advanced towards the north. The first direct exchange between the two countries took place between Axel Oxenstierna and general Wallenstein in August of 1628. Despite some rather amicable initial contacts, Wallenstein reacted strongly to Swedish support for the beleaguered city of Stralsund. We do not want the Swedish king to meddle in the affairs of the empire, Wallenstein told the chancellor; 'the Roman Empire can perfectly well conduct its wars and conclude its treaties without him'.<sup>152</sup>

This first rejection was soon to be followed by others, and during the course of the subsequent years the Swedes' list of insults and humiliations heaped upon them by the Austrians grew increasingly longer. They



regarded support for Sigismund and the attempts to prevent a peace between Sweden and Poland as undue Imperial meddling in the war between the Vasa cousins. And we are already familiar with the list of complaints enumerated in the *War Manifesto*: Swedish couriers who were travelling abroad had been mistreated by the Austrians and the emperor had given no excuses for the action; Swedish military recruitment in Germany had been prevented and Swedish exports hindered; Swedish subjects had been deprived of their ships and they had suffered as a result. 'What is allowed to others, is not allowed to us'; 'we are denied even the most everyday forms of intercourse with other nations'.

More than anything, however, it was the 'Lübeck affair' which came to symbolise the Imperial attitude towards Sweden and its king. As part of the alliance concluded between Sweden and Denmark, Gustav Adolf had assured himself a right to be a party to any treaty signed by the Danes, and in accordance with this agreement Gustav Adolf dispatched his own delegation to Lübeck and furnished them with a detailed list of Swedish demands. His hope was that his diplomats would be able to serve in the capacity of mediators between king Kristian and the emperor and in this way to force the Austrians to make concessions. When they arrived in Lübeck, however, the Swedes were first refused an audience before the Imperial negotiators and, the following day, promptly informed not only that they could not attend the conference, but also that they had no right to remain on German soil. In order to properly understand the issue at stake here, we should remember that the congress was a particularly important arena for the regulation of seventeenth-century inter-state affairs. The congress was a stage of diplomacy which reflected the events taking place on the stage of world politics, and the standing of each prince and each country was directly manifested in the way the delegations were seated in the conference room and in the way they treated each other. To be insulted at a congress was a very serious matter, and the treatment of the Swedish delegates at Lübeck was a public humiliation of the country and its king before the assembled delegates of all other princes. King Gustav Adolf's reaction was immediate and strong: when news of the incident reached Stockholm, he was flabbergasted, or as the royal secretary reported, "'perplexed" for several days'.<sup>153</sup> The situation was only aggravated by the fact English and Dutch delegations were allowed to serve in the position of mediators that Gustav Adolf had intended for his own men.<sup>154</sup>

After the Lübeck affair, relations with the emperor entered a new phase. In a sense the bridges had been burned. Or, as the king argued in the Council, it would be a sign of weakness to send a peace mission to Vienna; our *securitas et reputatio* will not allow it, and it will make it appear as

though we were 'begging for the peace'. In addition, to ask for an audience before the emperor would only be to ask for yet another humiliation. If the Swedes were to appear on the stage provided by the Austrian court they would hardly be expected to act with much confidence. As the members of the Council considered the issue further, it increasingly came to terrify them: 'What if we are not even given an audience?' 'What if our diplomats have to wait for weeks in some Viennese suburb?' 'What if we are admitted, but treated with insults?' 'What should we do, for example, if they hand us letters of accreditation made out to someone other than the representatives of "Gustav II Adolf, king of Sweden"?'<sup>155</sup> As the Swedish leaders were aware, however, some conciliatory measure or another had to be undertaken if the war they contemplated was to be considered just, and as a way out of this dilemma they ended up sending a delegate not to Vienna in the name of the king, but to the Imperial generals in the name of the Council. In this way they were able to demonstrate their concern for the peace while simultaneously minimising the risk of new humiliations.

What can we do when a right to self-description is denied us? When the character which appears in the story that we tell about ourselves is not recognised by others as a valid description of who we take ourselves to be? Above we addressed this question and, as I argued, we have three basic options. The first option is to abandon our story and to give up all attempts at a self-description. In the Renaissance there were of course some groups that did exactly this. These are the 'lost tribes' that sometimes appear in footnotes in our history books: the people of d'Oc, the Gaels in Cornwall, or for that matter the Ingrians, Courians and Vendians that appear in our material. The second option is to accept the description given by others; to admit that we were incorrect about ourselves after all and that the story which others tell about us is more appropriate. In the Renaissance, this was the option adopted by the Scots, the Welsh, the Norwegians, the Finns, the Estonians and the Lithuanians who remained as communities but under foreign domination. The third and last option, however, is to stand by our story and to fight for it; to seek to convince others that we are indeed right about ourselves and that they are wrong. This reaction too was common at the time, common enough, in fact, for political theorists to worry about it. There are three principal 'causes of a quarrel', as Thomas Hobbes explained in *De cive*:

First, competition; second, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The . . . third, [maketh men invade] for reputation . . . for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons, or by reflection in their kindred, their nation, their profession, or their name.<sup>156</sup>

Which of these three options Gustav Adolf and Sweden would choose was to become increasingly clear during the course of the year 1629. Once the Lübeck conference had ended in great embarrassment to the Swedes and once the possibility of a diplomatic mission to Vienna was dismissed as too risky, peace proposals were no longer seriously considered. The Imperial intermediaries that approached Axel Oxenstierna during the spring of 1630 were all mistrusted. 'It appears that the emperor is ready for a settlement', the chancellor reported in letters to the king, 'but how can we rely on his word? How can we come to a peaceful settlement with such a fickle enemy?' For the same reason the plan for a peace conference at Danzig was rejected, or rather, the Swedish delegates arrived for the conference, but only much too late and once Swedish troops had already landed on German soil.

In the spring of 1630, I concluded above, the interests of the country were no longer at stake. 'It is true that a settlement would guarantee our security', the chancellor wrote in a letter to the king, but even if we did trust the Austrians and did settle the affair amicably, 'a treaty would not avenge the injustices of the past'. What, then, would avenge these past injustices? How could king Gustav Adolf gain recognition of himself and his country? Inaction was clearly not an option and neither was the king prepared to accept the descriptions that others provided. The stories the king had told – the identity he had fashioned for his country – had somehow to be defended; the emperor's repeated humiliations required a more forceful response. Only through *action* could Gustav Adolf prove that he indeed was a legitimate *actor* on the world stage. The solution was obvious. Why not let *virtù* master Fortuna? Why not simply go ahead with the war that had been prepared during all these years? 'A *bellum offensivum* is necessary', the king argued in a letter to the chancellor, '*ex reputatione regni* [on account of the reputation of the kingdom] we cannot allow them to treat Us unjustly and disgracefully'.<sup>157</sup> In 1630 Gustav Adolf took his country to war in order to force the Austrians to grant the recognition they had failed to grant freely.

## Conclusion: the end of the story?

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In introducing this study I raised the perennial question of why there is war. As we saw, in our time this issue has characteristically been discussed in utilitarian and rationalistic terms. Wars, like all other actions, are supposedly brought about by individuals or groups who act in their interests. When seen from this perspective, however, war participation often fails to make sense. In a war the stakes and the risks are often too high or too unpredictable for rational calculations to be possible, and the very real prospect of losing one's life can make the promise of even large utility gains appear unattractive. War participation, in short, seems quite irrational, and in our time an irrational action is a synonym for an action that is meaningless, misguided or crazy. That people are misguided or crazy is also what we often assume when watching TV reports from obscure wars in faraway parts of the world. Or for that matter, what we may conclude when we think back at the bellicose actions of our own former selves. Why were Swedes and Danes at war for hundreds of years? How could Hitler induce the Germans to attack the rest of Europe? Why did Catholics and Protestants kill each other in northern Ireland? It all seems like madness. Surely we should have been able to resolve our differences in a more peaceful, more reasonable, fashion!

Once we understand that wars involve not only questions of interests, however, but also questions of identities, they will start to make more sense. An action which cannot be understood in terms of utility gains may be necessary in order to make utility gains possible. A war will protect our selves and our way of life, and as long as we identify ourselves with our community, it may be worth fighting for it regardless of the costs involved. If we do not fight we can no longer be who we are, and if this happens we might as well be dead.

Yet while this may be our way of reasoning before the fact, as it were,

everything changes in retrospect. While there is no point outside of our present identity from which a future, radically alien, identity can be judged, the converse is also true. Once our old self is abandoned and we have become those other people whom we feared, we simply cannot understand what all the fuss was about. In retrospect occupations often do not seem like such bad things – take the Roman invasion of Spain for example or the Norman invasion of Britain – and at any rate they are quite impossible to undo for the simple reason that they have made us into who we are today.

Wars may not only be necessary when a well-established identity is threatened, however, but also when we are trying to create a new identity for ourselves. As we saw, this was the reason why Sweden went to war in 1630, and in our century a number of secessionist, nationalist and guerrilla movements have fought for the same reason. What these movements have wanted is not primarily that a certain set of demands be fulfilled, but first of all – and as a precondition for everything else – that they be recognised as independent states among others. Once statehood and independence are attained, it has been assumed, all other requests will easily be met. In this way hundreds of wars and millions of deaths have been the results of what in the end is nothing more and nothing less than the reification of a particularly rigid scheme of classification. Once it came to be decided that a state was 'the thing to be', once the status of 'state' was granted to some political communities and denied to others, and once only military means were thought to assure recognition, wars were inevitable.

Yet here too everything looks different in retrospect. As soon as our own identity is safely established, we relax and often forget what the old contest involved. As soon as we are recognised and accepted, relations with others will be put on an entirely different footing. We may certainly continue to argue – perhaps even to fight – but we will no longer question each other's fundamental right to existence. Since peace and reason presuppose that identities can be taken for granted, relations between subjects who mutually recognise each other will be more peaceful and more 'rational' than relations between subjects who do not.<sup>1</sup> This is why liberal societies ultimately are more stable than totalitarian ones, why the countries of western Europe have been at peace for fifty years, and why neo-nationalist movements in eastern Europe are a threat.

If many wars can be explained as fights for recognition, however, our analysis may also help us define a strategy through which peace can be achieved. If the reified scheme through which identities are classified is in many cases to be blamed for war, we must explore ways in which this scheme may be *de-reified* – made more malleable and more ambiguous. There are at least two ways in which to do this: we could either make it

easier for a community to pass the test of recognition, or reduce the importance we attach to the status of 'state'. If we choose the first strategy we should look for ways in which previously neglected and inferior groups could be given a say and a presence in the company of legitimate and fully constituted actors. If we choose the second strategy we should try to construct alternative, non-state, identities which may come to be seen as just as desirable as statehood itself. If this analysis is correct, a new field of research has been identified to which both scholars and political activists may apply their creativity.

Our explanatory framework is not only applicable to questions of peace and war, however, but also to everyday actions undertaken in the course of everyday lives. A narrative theory of action replaces the modern myths regarding the autonomy of desire and the transcendental nature of the self, with desires and selves that are socially constructed – constructed through stories that speakers tell before audiences. In this way a narrative theory of action can explain features of the social world which the modern orthodox model cannot even begin to consider. Why people participate in collective actions, for example – why workers form trade unions, say, or why a people under colonial rule rebels against its masters. Or why people react so strongly whenever their dignity and self-respect are threatened – why rape or racism are such crimes, or why economic disadvantages or social discrimination may unleash revolutionary actions.<sup>2</sup> Similarly a narrative theory allows us to grasp features of our private lives which must remain profoundly puzzling to a rationalist. Why we work hard even when it gives us little pleasure, for example, or why we want to make money even when there are few things we want to buy; why we fall in love with one person rather than another, or why someone may prefer to stay with an abusive partner rather than to be happy with a non-abusive one.<sup>3</sup> To wit: a narrative theory of action can explain why people never want things alone, but always together with others, and why we are preoccupied not only with what we want, but also with what we *want to be*.

As we concluded above, to analyse actions undertaken in defence of an identity in rationalistic terms is to fundamentally misunderstand them. Independence fighters that make war on the foreign rulers that modernised their country, a working-class party that engages in a struggle against the very people who supply its daily bread, a member of a minority group who resorts to physical violence in response to a racist slur, all seem to react like children – out of proportion to the damages suffered. As our alternative explanatory framework reminds us, however, life concerns more important things than the calculation of utilities. People can accept almost any kind



of treatment and any kind of circumstances as long as their stories about themselves are accepted and as long as they are treated with respect. When our self-descriptions are threatened, on the other hand, we do what it takes to protect them. Without a story we simply cannot be, and when forced to do so we fight for our selves regardless of the costs involved.

If there is indeed such an alternative, non-rational, basis for action, we may wonder why this fact has so rarely been noted. Why have almost all social scientists studied what people want and so very few what people want to be? The answer is, I believe, that social scientists have accepted the modern mythology of the transcendental self – the notion that there is a 'real' or 'true' self which is given prior to, and independently of, social interaction. Since they have assumed this metaphysical entity to be ever-present, there has always been someone around to whom rational calculations can be ascribed. Moreover, since this underlying self is assumed to be constant over time and between contexts, it must be able to make choices also between identities. The self that we 'really are' decides who we 'appear to be' – our 'deep' self determines our 'superficial' self.

As a result of this way of reasoning, modern men and women came to use their identities instead of worrying about or analysing them. And while this gave many of them an extraordinary confidence in themselves, it also alienated them from people whose identities were less secure. People whose identities are never put on the line can never entirely understand the actions of people whose selves are. Rational considerations will exhaust the explanatory options available to these self-confident observers and they will be constitutionally incapable of understanding the fact that people may act on another basis. They will go on looking for the interest that an action was designed to further, and when they cannot find it they will declare their objects irrational, confused, or somehow less than fully human. This is one reason why the world often seems so strange to white judges in racially divided societies, TV reporters assigned to third-world countries, tenured professors of prestigious universities and chief executive officers of major corporations.

If Sweden went to war in defence of its national identity and not in defence of its national interests, we may wonder why this fact has so far remained unobserved. Why have previous scholars failed to see the evidence which is so obviously there in the sources? We could imagine a number of different explanations of this curious fact: perhaps we have more source material at our disposal, perhaps we have read this source material more carefully, or perhaps we are simply brighter than previous generations of scholars. Tempting as it may be to draw any of these conclusions, they are not

correct. As far as new source material is concerned, none was available to us, and as far as previous scholars are concerned, those who have studied our war have consistently been among the best minds in each successive generation. Instead, we must conclude, we were able to rewrite the history of the Swedish intervention for the same reason that all previous histories were rewritten: because we have come to regard different causal schemes as relevant and because we are able to tell different stories about the time in which the intervention occurred.

During the three hundred-plus years which followed upon the Swedish intervention the state came to be established as the only viable political unit, we said. As a result, scholars came to take the state for granted and history became the success story of the inevitable progress of mankind which had allowed the state and the inter-state system to emerge. At the turn of the twentieth century – when the vast majority of the studies on the Swedish intervention were written – the state was an inescapable, taken-for-granted, fact, and the historians of the period were consequently constitutionally incapable of understanding a period such as the early seventeenth century when meanings were up for grabs and identities remained undetermined. Almost everything that the men and women of the Renaissance did or said failed to make sense to these scholars. Seventeenth-century preoccupations with glory, reputation and honour were reduced to ‘pretexts’ behind which ‘true interests’ were hidden. The rules of court life or of diplomatic conduct were seen as preoccupations for pretentious sissies in powdered wigs, and ancient heroes like the Goths were rejected as irrelevant mythological fantasies. International law came likewise to be regarded as nothing more than an idealistic set of stipulations radically divorced from the imperatives of power politics, and although the Swedish leaders were occasionally lauded for their concern with the ‘morality’ of inter-state conduct, it was impossible for turn-of-the-twentieth-century historians to explain exactly why Gustav Adolf and his advisers had wasted so much time on it. Since Sweden was, it *had to be*, and not for a moment did the historians consider the fact that a Swedish identity had to be *created* before it could come to exist.

What has happened since the beginning of this century is that questions regarding identities have once again become matters of much private anxiety as well as intense public debate. Once again we are asking ourselves what it might mean to be a ‘man’ and what it might mean to belong to a ‘state’. That is, we are asking the very same questions that the men and women of the Renaissance asked. We are going through a formative moment of our own, we could say, when meanings are once again up for grabs, when we can see ourselves in new ways and tell new stories about

what we see. Since this is the case we have once again been reminded of what the men and women of the Renaissance knew so well: that the making of a life for oneself ultimately requires a *double* definition – that we must define what we want, to be sure, but that we first must define who we are. Consequently we understand the early seventeenth century better than the scholars of the last three hundred-odd years, not because of our superior power of vision, but because of our different perspective. We are caught in a similar situation to the people we are writing about – we share a view of life and a predicament.

The Renaissance, we said above, is the period we characteristically think of as the beginning of the stories we most commonly tell about our selves; it is the period when the modern subjects – man and state – were born. Yet if man and state now once again are being put into question we may perhaps begin to suspect that we have finally reached the end of our narratives – that the modern subjects are about to ‘die’.<sup>4</sup> That we, in other words, are studying the ‘re-naissance’ of man and state in early modern Europe in light of our present – very late-modern – premonitions of a ‘re-mort’. That we have come to the end of subjectivity is also what many, recently much debated, eschatologically inclined authors have tried to argue. According to contemporary post-Hegelians, history – or rather ‘History’ – has itself ended and as a result there is no longer a distinct place either for man or for the state as traditionally understood.<sup>5</sup> As contemporary ‘post-modernists’ have maintained, we can look forward to a time in which man will be erased, ‘like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea’ and in which the ‘meta-narrative’ of the state will no longer be told.<sup>6</sup> And as rather more level-headed liberal commentators have affirmed, the state – if not man – is bound to become increasingly irrelevant owing to the impact of economic, political and social interdependence.

It is of course impossible to say whether our present formative moment will result not in new identities replacing old ones, but in the very end of subjectivity *as such*. Human beings are not very good at imagining what non-being is like. Yet we should remember that loose apocalyptic talk is not, in itself, evidence of any such hypothesis. In fact the very opposite conclusion could be drawn. In a way which a narrative concept of the person allows us to understand, human beings will always be profoundly preoccupied with endings. The end is after all what makes the story possible in the first place. As story-tellers we know that our words can only make sense as moments which lead up to a conclusion, and as listeners we listen attentively only since we want to know how it will all end. Take this end away and there will be nothing for the story-teller to tell and nothing for the listeners to understand. Thus, while we may dread the end of the story, we

will always try to *envision it*, since this is the way in which we make stories make sense.<sup>7</sup>

This kind of envisioning is also, I would argue, what the discussion regarding 'the end of subjectivity' is all about. The story would not be if it did not end somewhere, and thus we – the subjects who appear in, and through, it – would not be either. Death is a prerequisite of all stories. This does not mean that death is the meaning of life, but it does mean that death makes a meaningful life possible. We need the end of our story – not the real, but the imagined end – since only the end can make sense of and give legitimacy to the present moment. This is especially likely to be the case during formative moments, and it explains why politics needs its utopias and why intellectuals constantly prophesy the end of this, that, or the other.

In this book we have studied how the state was established as a sovereign political unit in the early seventeenth century and how a particular set of political leaders fought to have their particular entity – 'Sweden' – included in this class. Just as the story of the state and the story of Sweden had a beginning, however, they will have an end. Yet we should remember that while the content that we give to our selves – the plots that we construct about our lives – will change dramatically in the future, just as they have changed dramatically in the past, a self will exist as long as stories are told about it. To envision an end to these stories is a crucial part of what it means to understand a story and as such it is a prerequisite of subjectivity and not a proof of its demise.

## Notes

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### Introduction: the beginning of the story

- 1 Compare G.W.F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T.M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) pp. 164–5.
- 2 For a classical discussion, see Johan Huizinga, [1938], *Homo Ludens: essai sur la fonction sociale du jeu*, translated by Cécile Seresia (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) pp. 90–1.
- 3 Compare Mead's discussion of games in George H. Mead, [1932], *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of A Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) pp. 144–64.
- 4 Compare Adam Smith's explanation of why human beings pursue wealth in Adam Smith, [1759], *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1974) p. 50; or Francis Fukuyama, 'The Thymotic Origins of Work', in his *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) pp. 223–34.
- 5 Compare Alessandro Pizzorno, 'Some Other Kinds of Otherness: A Critique of "Rational Choice" Theories', in *Development, Democracy and the Art of Trespassing: Essays in Honor of Albert O. Hirschman*, edited by Alejandro Foxley (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1986) pp. 358–9.
- 6 The following account relies heavily on Michael Roberts, [1973], *Gustavus Adolphus* (London: Longman, 1992) pp. 127–80.
- 7 Quoted in Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, p. 139.
- 8 Axel Strindberg, [1937], *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm: en historia om klasskamp i Sverige, 1630–1718* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 1971) pp. 42–8.
- 9 Quoted in Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, p. 160.
- 10 Quoted in Carl Grimberg, *Svenska folkets underbara öden: Gustav II Adolfs, Kristinas och Karl X Gustavs tid* (Stockholm: Norstedt & Söner, 1915) p. 164.
- 11 See G. W. F. Hegel, [1830–1], *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sebree (New York: Dover, 1956) p. 434.
- 12 See, for example, Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, p. 1.
- 13 The historiography of the intervention is conclusively treated by Sverker

Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf, Sverige och trettioåriga kriget: historieskrivning och kult* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1992).

- 14 Point made by Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992) pp. 45–87.

### 1. Historical and scientific explanations

- 1 Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*. I discuss Oredsson's book at some length in Erik Ringmar, 'Historical Writing and Rewriting: Gustav II Adolf, the French Revolution and the Historians', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, no. 3, vol. 18, 1993.
- 2 Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 241–7, pp. 12–13 and 297–8.
- 3 The total sum of all historians adds up to more than 166 since several of them are placed in more than one category.
- 4 Edmund Burke, [1795], 'Thoughts on French Affairs', in *Edmund Burke's Politics: Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke on Reform, Revolution, and War*, edited by Ross J. S. Hoffman and Paul Levack (New York: Knopf, 1949) p. 403. For a similar argument see also Alexis de Tocqueville, [1856], *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday, 1955) pp. 10–13.
- 5 Friedrich Schiller, *The History of the Thirty Years War in Germany*, translated by Captain Blaquiére (Dublin: 1800) p. 2.
- 6 Schiller, *History of the Thirty Years War*, p. 8.
- 7 See, for example, Nils Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1932) p. 321.
- 8 Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, p. 101.
- 9 *Ibid.* p. 186.
- 10 August Strindberg, *Gustaf Adolf: Play in Five Acts*; see Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 119–20.
- 11 Gustaf Droysen, *Gustaf Adolf*, 2 volumes, 1869 and 1870; see Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 67–8.
- 12 Curt Weibull, 'Gustaf II Adolf', *Scandia*, vol. 6, 1933, pp. 20–1; compare Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, p. 290.
- 13 Michael Roberts, 'The Political Objectives of Gustav Adolf in Germany, 1630–2', in his *Essays in Swedish History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) p. 103.
- 14 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987) p. 66.
- 15 Ludwig Häusser, *Geschichte des Zeitalters der Reformation 1517–1648*, 1868; see Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 69–70.
- 16 Clausewitz is discussed in Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 48, 89–91, 95–6, 99–103.
- 17 Weibull, 'Gustaf II Adolf'.
- 18 Franz Mehring, [1894], *Gustav II Adolf*, translated by Claes-Eric Danelius (Göteborg: Proletärkultur, 1982) p. 11.



- 19 Quoted in Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) p. 133.
- 20 Discussed by Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 232–3.
- 21 Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, pp. 17–18.
- 22 The German version of the *Manifesto* is printed as an appendix in Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 284–94.
- 23 Discussed by Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 31–40.
- 24 Paul Ricœur, 'The Narrative Function', in his *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 288.
- 25 Compare Arthur Danto, [1965], *Narration and Knowledge: Including the Integral Text of Analytical Philosophy of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) p. 143.
- 26 See, for example, Hannah Arendt, [1954], 'The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern', in her *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) pp. 49ff.
- 27 For a statement to this effect, see Herbert Butterfield, [1931], *The Whig Interpretation of History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) pp. 14–15.
- 28 See, for example, Karl Popper, 'Science: Conjectures and Refutations', in his *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965) pp. 52ff. Compare Rupert Hall, 'On Whiggism', *History of Science*, vol. 21, 1983, pp. 51–2.
- 29 Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant, 'Whig History and Present-Centered History', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1988, pp. 10–16.
- 30 Compare Leszek Kolakowski, 'Fabula Mundi and Cleopatra's Nose', in his *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) p. 242.
- 31 On the roles played by the French Revolution in historiography, see François Furet, *Penser la Révolution Française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) pp. 19–22; 138ff.
- 32 Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988) pp. 121–74. Compare also Henri Lefebvre, 'What is the Historical Past?', *New Left Review*, vol. 90, 1975, pp. 33–4.
- 33 Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, p. 168.
- 34 As argued by W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964) p. 105; Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, pp. 277–8.
- 35 Compare Nietzsche on the *historia abscondita*, the 'hidden history', in Friedrich Nietzsche, [1887], *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York, Vintage Books, 1974) § 34, p. 104. Or Jorge Luis Borges, 'Kafka and His Precursors', in his *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Direction Books, 1964) p. 21.
- 36 Mead makes a similar point in George Herbert Mead, [1932], *The Philosophy of the Present*, edited by Arthur Murphy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) p. 30.

- 37 I develop this argument in Erik Ringmar, 'Alexander Wendt: A Social Scientist Struggling with History', in *The Future of International Relations: Masters in the Making?*, edited by Iver Neumann and Ole Waever (London: Routledge, in press).
- 38 Many studies use a similar approach. For example: Manus Midlarsky, *The Onset of World War* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988); John Stoessinger, *Why Nations Go to War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990); Joshua Goldstein, *Long Cycles: Prosperity and War in the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York: Academic Press, 1980).
- 39 Nazli Choucri and Robert North, *Nations in Conflict: National Growth and International Violence* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1975); Nazli Choucri and Robert North, 'Lateral Pressure in International Relations: Concept and Theory', in *Handbook of War Studies*, edited by Manus I. Midlarsky (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988).
- 40 Choucri and North, 'Lateral Pressure', pp. 289–90.
- 41 *Ibid.* p. 289.
- 42 Choucri and North, *Nations in Conflict*, p. 19.
- 43 Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- 44 *Ibid.* pp. 33–4.
- 45 Compare Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) pp. 77–8. On the concept of 'exploitation' as employed in rational choice theory, see Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, 'An Economic Theory of Alliances', *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 48, 1966.
- 46 Gilpin, *War and Change*, p. 9. See also Robert Gilpin, 'The Theory of Hegemonic War', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1988, p. 595.
- 47 Gilpin, 'Theory of Hegemonic War', pp. 601–2.
- 48 Charles Doran, 'Power Cycle Theory of Systems Structure and Stability: Commonalities and Complementarities', in *Handbook of War Studies*, edited by Manus I. Midlarsky (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) p. 90.
- 49 Doran, 'Power Cycle Theory', p. 84.
- 50 Choucri and North, 'Lateral Pressure', p. 301.
- 51 Gilpin, 'Theory of Hegemonic War', pp. 606–7.
- 52 Doran, 'Power Cycle Theory', pp. 91–2.
- 53 Authors in this group in addition to those discussed here include Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) as well as traditional 'realists' like Hans Morgenthau, [1948], *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1960).
- 54 Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) pp. ix–x.

- 55 *Ibid.* p. 46.
- 56 *Ibid.* p. 127.
- 57 John Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).
- 58 Bueno de Mesquita, *War Trap*, pp. 66–7.
- 59 Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). See also Graham Allison, 'Conceptual Models of the Cuban Missile Crisis', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 63, no. 3, September 1969; Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) pp. 149–52.
- 60 Allison, *Essence of Decision*, p. 175.
- 61 *Ibid.* p. 174.
- 62 Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) pp. 319–406.
- 63 Karl Popper, [1972], *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 179.
- 64 Karl Popper, [1957], *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) p. 148. Compare Robert D'Amico, *Historicism and Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1989); James Farr, 'Situational Analysis: Explanation in Political Science', *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 47, no. 4, 1985, p. 1094.
- 65 Spiro Latsis, 'A Research Programme in Economics', in *Method and Appraisal in Economics*, edited by Spiro Latsis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 16.
- 66 Example provided by Arnold Wolfers, 'The Actors in International Politics', in his *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962) pp. 13–14.
- 67 Jervis makes this point in Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, p. 19.
- 68 Compare Latsis, 'Research Programme', p. 16.
- 69 Compare Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, pp. 144–5.
- 70 Compare D'Amico, *Historicism and Knowledge*, p. 28.
- 71 See, for example, Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, pp. 13–31.
- 72 Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, 'Toward a Scientific Understanding of International Conflict: A Personal View', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, 1985, p. 12. Or Bueno de Mesquita, *War Trap*, p. 138; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, p. 8; Steinbruner, *Cybernetic Theory of Decision*, p. 95.
- 73 See, for example Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957); Brian Barry, [1970], *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp. 99–125.
- 74 Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Is a Science of Comparative Politics Possible?' in his *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971) for example, p. 268.
- 75 Peter Winch, [1958], *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).
- 76 For a discussion see Ragnar Björk, *Den historiska argumenteringen: konstruk-*

- tion, narration och kolligation: förklaringsresonemang hos Nils Ahnlund och Erik Lönnroth (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1983) pp. 200–4, 217–19
- 77 Compare the argument in John Dunn, 'Practising History and Social Science on "realist" Assumptions', in *Action and Interpretation: Studies in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, edited by Christopher Hookway and Philip Pettit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p. 162.
- 78 Compare Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, p. 241.
- 79 See, for example, Weibull, 'Gustaf II Adolf', p. 15.
- 80 Compare Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Janovitch, 1977) p. 133.
- 81 Ricœur talks about a 'gap between the theory of action and that of history', in Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, p. 147. See Danto, *Narration and Knowledge*, pp. 182–3.
- 82 Compare Jean-Paul Sartre, [1938], *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) p. 65, and Kurt Hübner, *Critique of Scientific Reason*, translated by Paul R. Dixon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 198.

## 2. The modern orthodoxy

- 1 W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', in Gallie, *Philosophy and Historical Understanding*.
- 2 Compare Nietzsche's genealogical approach and its use by Foucault in Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in his *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, translated by Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).
- 3 Thomas Hobbes, [1651], *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) p. 119.
- 4 *Ibid.* p. 130.
- 5 *Ibid.* pp. 150, 162.
- 6 *Ibid.* p. 185.
- 7 *Ibid.* p. 188.
- 8 Compare Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) p. 31.
- 9 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 185, 227–8.
- 10 *Ibid.* p. 188.
- 11 Compare David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) p. 70.
- 12 Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*, pp. 43–4.
- 13 For a discussion of this dictum, see J. A. W. Gunn, 'Interests Will Not Lie: A Seventeenth-Century Political Maxim', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1968.
- 14 For an exhaustive treatment see Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp. 139–61.

- 15 Compare Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*, p. 37.
- 16 See Friedrich Meinecke, [1924], *Machiavellism*, translated by Douglas Scott (Boulder: Westview, 1984).
- 17 Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*, pp. 33–4.
- 18 According to the motto of Duke de Rohan quoted in Gunn, 'Interests Will Not Lie', pp. 552–3.
- 19 Bartelson talks about these tables as the *mathesis* of interests. Bartelson, *Genealogy of Sovereignty*, pp. 160–4. On the predictability of interests, see Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*, pp. 48–56.
- 20 Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*, p. 35.
- 21 As Gunn points out; see Gunn, 'Interests Will Not Lie', p. 556.
- 22 Hans Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest* (New York: Knopf, 1951).
- 23 See Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 5; Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Theory of International Politics', in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, edited by Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 52.
- 24 For a recent critique see Hollis and Smith, *Explaining and Understanding*, pp. 24–5.
- 25 As argued by, for example, Fred Sondermann, 'The Concept of the National Interest', in *The Theory and Practice of International Relations*, edited by William Olson *et al.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983) p. 58. Compare discussion in Robert Keohane, 'Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond', in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics*, pp. 171–5.
- 26 Compare Felix Oppenheim, 'Self-Interest and Public Interest', in his *Political Concepts: A Reconstruction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981) p. 125.
- 27 Compare Alexander Wendt, 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory', *International Organization*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1987, note 65, pp. 359–60.
- 28 Compare William Connolly, 'The Import of Contests over "Interests"', in his *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) p. 63.
- 29 Martin Hollis, 'Of Masks and Men', in *The Category of the Person*, edited by Martin Carrithers, Steven Collins and Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 30 Alessandro Pizzorno, 'Is Self-Preservation an Individualistic Concept?', European University Institute, Florence, 1993.
- 31 This distinction is made by Hollis, 'Masks and Men', pp. 217–33. For an exhaustive account see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- 32 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 227.
- 33 John Locke, [1690], *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) book II, chapter 2, para. 53. Discussed by Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 159–60.
- 34 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 174–5.

- 35 *Ibid.* pp. 171–2.
- 36 On 'inner nature', see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 185–98.
- 37 Elias talks about 'homo clausus' and 'the inner man' in Norbert Elias, 'Appendix I: Introduction to the 1968 Edition', in Elias, [1939], *The Civilizing Process, The Development in Manners: Changes in the Code of Conduct and Feeling in Early Modern Times* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978) p. 258. See also Norbert Elias, 'Conscience de soi et image de l'homme', in his *La Société des individus* (Paris: Fayard, 1991) pp. 161–62.
- 38 Compare Jon Elster, 'Introduction', in *Multiple Selves*, edited by Jon Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 39 David Hume, [1739–40], *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) p. 300.
- 40 *Ibid.* p. 300. Italics in the original.
- 41 *Ibid.* pp. 300–1.
- 42 *Ibid.* p. 307.
- 43 *Ibid.* p. 462. Compare Hirschman on the reintroduction of passion as a creative force during the course of the eighteenth century in Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*, p. 47.
- 44 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 220.
- 45 Waltz, 'Theory of International Politics', pp. 87–92; compare the critique in Richard Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism,' in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics*, pp. 268–73; Wendt, 'Agent–Structure Problem', pp. 335–70.
- 46 Compare Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 10; Robert Gilpin, 'The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism', in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics*, p. 314.
- 47 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 309.
- 48 Compare Rachel Kydd, *Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946) pp. 161–2.
- 49 Compare Hollis and Smith, *Explaining and Understanding*, pp. 38–9.
- 50 As argued in, among other works, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).
- 51 See, for example, the work of Allison discussed above.
- 52 As persuasively argued by Hollis, 'Masks and Men', p. 227.
- 53 John Gerard Ruggie, 'Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis', in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics*, p. 141.
- 54 Compare Hume on 'Of Liberty and Necessity', in Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 447–60.
- 55 Compare D. W. Hamlyn, *Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 192. For the same argument, see also Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990) p. 154; Roderick M. Chisholm, *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976) pp. 37–41.
- 56 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 300. Emphasis added.
- 57 Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 154.



- 58 Hollis, 'Masks and Men', p. 227.
- 59 Compare for example Georg Henrik von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971) p. 106.
- 60 Compare Jon Elster, 'Introduction', in *Rational Choice*, edited by Jon Elster (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) pp. 4, 15; as well as Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 464.
- 61 W. D. Falk, 'Action-Guiding Reasons', *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 60, 1963, p. 706.
- 62 Compare Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Willing* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Janovitch, 1977) p. 87.
- 63 *Letter to the Romans*, 7:15.
- 64 Compare for example Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, 'Where Does the Akratic Break Take Place', in her *Mind in Action: Essays in the Philosophy of Mind* (Boston: Beacon, 1988) pp. 229–45; Donald Davidson, 'How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?' in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).
- 65 See Jon Elster, [1979], *Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Elster, *Multiple Selves*.
- 66 Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Willing*, p. 88. On the problems of explaining actions from 'values', see Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*, chapter 4.
- 67 Falk, 'Action-Guiding Reasons', p. 709.
- 68 F. M. Barnard, 'Accounting for Actions: Causality and Teleology', *History and Theory*, vol. 20, 1981, p. 304; Falk, 'Action-Guiding Reasons', pp. 710–11; Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Idea of a Social Science', in his *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, pp. 215–16.
- 69 Compare Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking*, pp. 71–8.
- 70 *Ibid.* pp. 75–6.
- 71 *Ibid.* p. 78.
- 72 See for example Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, book II, chapter 23.
- 73 Jan Marejko, 'L'Espace et le désir', in his *Cosmologie et politique: l'influence de la révolution scientifique sur la formation des régimes politiques modernes* (Lausanne: L'Age de l'Homme, 1989) pp. 59–61; compare Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 161.
- 74 Compare Martin Heidegger quoted in Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking*, p. 71.
- 75 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 127. Compare Alasdair MacIntyre, [1966], 'The Antecedents of Action', in his *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, p. 192.
- 76 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 162.
- 77 W.D. Falk, 'Action-Guiding Reasons', pp. 711–12.
- 78 Barnard, 'Accounting for Actions', pp. 297–8.

### 3. A narrative theory of action

- 1 Taylor discusses essentialism in Daniel Taylor, *Explanation and Meaning: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) pp. 155-8. Compare Popper's critique in Karl Popper, 'Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance', pp. 18-21; 'Three Views Concerning Human Knowledge', pp. 103-7, both in his *Conjectures and Refutations*.
- 2 'Love', and 'God', *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).
- 3 Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking*, p. 102.
- 4 To adopt Aristotle's definition of metaphor given in *Poetics*, translation by Leon Golden (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 1457b.
- 5 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) pp. 30-1.
- 6 Max Black, 'Models and Archetypes', in his *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).
- 7 Compare Mary Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1966) pp. 157-77. For related arguments and examples, see Goffman on the 'framing' of social practices and Goodman on the construction of 'worlds', Ervin Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974); Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978).
- 8 Milan Kundera, [1984], *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) p. 88.
- 9 See Gaston Bachelard, [1958], *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) pp. xi-xiv.
- 10 Compare Kundera, *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, pp. 88-9.
- 11 Compare Max Black, [1955], 'Metaphor', in *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, edited by Mark Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981) pp. 73-4. Richards uses the terms 'tenor' and 'vehicle': I. A. Richards, *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936) p. 96.
- 12 Paul Ricoeur, *La Métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) p. 105. 'The metaphor holds together within one simple meaning two different missing parts of different contexts of this meaning'; Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) p. 80.
- 13 Nelson Goodman, 'On Metaphor', in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968) p. 69.
- 14 Example taken from Black, 'Metaphor', p. 75.
- 15 This is something which anthropologists realised a long time ago. See for example, Sherry Ortner, 'On Key Symbols', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 75, no. 6, 1973; Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), as well as the contributors to *Beyond Metaphor: The*

- Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*, edited by James W. Fernandez (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- 16 Compare Geertz' definition of culture as 'systems of collective meanings'. See Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in his *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) pp. 11–13.
- 17 Compare the 'short dictionary of misunderstood words' which Kundera provides in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, pp. 89–114. Compare also Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 8.
- 18 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, pp. ix–xii.
- 19 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) pp. 46–7. See also Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942) p. 92; Richard Harvey Brown, *Society as Text: Essays on Rhetoric, Reason, and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) pp. 97–117.
- 20 For a large number of examples, see Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, pp. 3–51.
- 21 Compare Brown, *Society as Text*, pp. 143–4.
- 22 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, pp. ix–xii.
- 23 Plot, as Aristotle suggested, is the *mimesis* of action: see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I, p. xi; see also pp. 32–42.
- 24 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Sartre, *La Nausée*, pp. 244–50.
- 25 Bruno Bettelheim, [1975], *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) pp. 10–11.
- 26 Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982) p. 119.
- 27 For a related argument, see von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, p. 115.
- 28 David Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) pp. 73–99.
- 29 Compare MacIntyre, 'Antecedents of Action', pp. 206–7.
- 30 Compare Scott's work on power and Bakhtin's on carnivals: James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) pp. 166–82; Mikhail Bakhtin, [1963], *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) pp. 122–37.
- 31 Compare Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, pp. 156–8.
- 32 See examples given in Northrop Frye, *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays 1974–1988*, edited by Robert D. Denham (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990); Gaston Bachelard, [1938], *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, translated by Alan C. M. Ross (London: Quartet Encounters, 1987).
- 33 One influential statement is given by Jon Elster, 'Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory', *Theory and Society*, vol. 11, 1982.
- 34 Compare Ricoeur, *Métaphore vive*, pp. 323–99.

- 35 Sartre, *La Nausée*, p. 64.
- 36 Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, p. 61.
- 37 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1985) p. 216.
- 38 Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, p. 170.
- 39 For a sociological application see Margaret R. Somers, 'The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach', *Theory and Society*, no. 5, vol. 23, 1994.
- 40 Compare Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking*, pp. 202–13.
- 41 Alexandre Koyré, [1957], *Du monde clos à l'univers infini*, translated by Raissa Tarr (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) pp. 193–215; Marejko, *L'Espace et le désir*, p. 59.
- 42 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).
- 43 *Ibid.* p. 36.
- 44 *Ibid.* p. 50.
- 45 Tuan, *Space and Place*, pp. 154–9.
- 46 On this point, see also, for example, J. G. A. Pocock, 'Time, Institutions and Action', in his *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) pp. 233–72. On the French Revolution in this context, see Keith Michael Baker, 'Political Representations of the Past', in his *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp. 31–58.
- 47 Carl Becker, 'The Uses of Posterity', in his *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932) pp. 119–68.
- 48 On the impossibility of a 'private language', see Ludwig Wittgenstein, [1958], *Philosophical Investigations*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) §§ 262–75.
- 49 Compare Arendt, *Life of the Mind: Thinking*; Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, pp. 62–4.
- 50 Compare Pizzorno, 'Other Kinds of Otherness'.
- 51 Compare Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, § 354, pp. 297–300.
- 52 Compare Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) pp. 117–94.
- 53 Compare G. W. F. Hegel, [1807], *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 111. Compare also Alexandre Kojève, [1947], *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by James Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Axel Honneth, 'Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition', *Political Theory*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1992; Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- 54 Compare Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §§ 191–2, p. 116–17; Kojève, *Introduction*, p. 19.

- 55 Compare Pizzorno, 'Other Kinds of Otherness', p. 367.
- 56 See, however, Scott on 'hidden transcripts' in Scott, *Domination and Resistance*, especially pp. 2–16, 108–35.
- 57 Pizzorno, 'Other Kinds of Otherness', p. 372.
- 58 Compare Hegel on Napoleon in this context. G. W. F. Hegel, [1821], *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), addition to § 331, p. 297.
- 59 Compare Carl Schmitt, [1932], *The Concept of the Political* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976) p. 36.
- 60 Compare Black, 'Metaphor', pp. 74–5.
- 61 On the 'stretching' of metaphors, see Margaret Masterman, 'The Nature of a Paradigm', in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, edited by Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 83.
- 62 Paul Ricoeur, 'Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics', in his *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 168–71.
- 63 On the 'death' of metaphors, see Percy Bysshe Shelley, [1821] 'A Defense of Poetry', in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: New American Library, 1966) p. 418.
- 64 Compare Rae on 'regimes' in Douglas Rae, 'Knowing Power: A Working Paper', in *Power, Inequality, and Democratic Politics: Essays in Honor of Robert A. Dahl*, edited by Ian Shapiro and Grant Reher (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988) p. 38.
- 65 For a similar argument, see Steven Lukes, [1974], *Power: A Radical View* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982) p. 47; Stephen Greenblatt, *Sir Walter Raleigh: The Renaissance Man and His Roles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) p. ix.
- 66 Compare Clifford Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 210–13 and Mona Ozouf, *La Fête révolutionnaire, 1789–1799* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
- 67 Compare the use of 'exemplars' in the natural sciences discussed in Thomas Kuhn, [1962], 'Postscript', in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) p. 189; Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), for example p. 53; Susanne Langer, [1942], *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) p. 11.
- 68 Paul Feyerabend, [1975], *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1988) p. 119. On the use of 'noble lies' in philosophy, see Jeff Mason, *Philosophical Rhetoric: The Function of Indirection in Philosophical Writing* (London: Routledge, 1989) esp. pp. 100–16.
- 69 Scott, *Domination and Resistance*, p. 133.
- 70 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) p. 39.
- 71 For a historical illustration see Kurt Johannessson, *Svensk retorik: från*

*Stockholms blodbad till Almedalen* (Stockholm: Nordstedt & Söner, 1983) pp. 122–3.

- 72 Paul Ricoeur, [1978], 'The Metaphorical Process', in Johnson, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, p. 234.
- 73 Compare MacIntyre, 'The Antecedents of Action', pp. 206–7.

#### 4. Historical and cultural preliminaries

- 1 For an overview see, for example, Ingvar Andersson, *Sveriges historia* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1982) pp. 157–221; Michael Roberts, *The Early Vasas: A History of Sweden, 1523–1611* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).
- 2 For general background see Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*; Michael Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus: A History of Sweden, 1611–1632*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1953–8) or Roberts' shorter account in Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*.
- 3 On the education of the king, see Kurt Johannesson, 'Gustav Adolf som retoriker', in *Gustav II Adolf: 350 år efter Lützen* (Stockholm: Livrustkammaren, 1982).
- 4 See, for example, Sven A. Nilsson, 'Reaktionen mot systemskiftet 1611: en linje i Gustav II Adolfs politik', *Skandia*, vol. 20, 1950.
- 5 For a biography of the chancellor, see Nils Ahnlund, *Axel Oxenstierna: intill Gustav Adolfs död* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1940).
- 6 According to Roberts' characterisation in Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, p. 24.
- 7 Discussed at length in Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus: A History of Sweden*, pp. 67–245.
- 8 For general background, see, for example, the articles in *The Thirty Years' War*, edited by Geoffrey Parker (New York: Military Heritage Press, 1984); C. V. Wedgwood, [1938], *The Thirty Years War* (London: Methuen, 1963); Myron P. Gutmann, 'The Origins of the Thirty Years' War', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1988.
- 9 Discussed in Nils Ahnlund, 'Gustaf II Adolf och tyska kriget 1620–25: den preussiska diversionsplanen och den nordtyska fronten', *Historisk Tidskrift*, 1917; Nils Ahnlund, 'Gustaf II Adolfs första preussiska fälttåg och den europeiska krisen 1626', *Historisk Tidskrift*, 1918.
- 10 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to the Council, 30 November 1628, *Arkiv till upplysning om svenska krigens och krigsinrättningarnes historia* (Stockholm: Norstedt & söner, 1854), part IA, pp. 6–13.
- 11 Compare Frazer's discussion of the two principles of magic in James George Frazer, [1890], *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994) pp. 26ff.
- 12 For the first example see Michel Foucault, [1966], *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973) p. 21. For the second example, see Bachelard, *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, pp. 92–8.



- 13 Peter Englund, *Det hotade huset: adliga föreställningar om samhället under stormaktstiden* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1989) p. 79; Walter J. Ong, [1967], *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1981) p. 233.
- 14 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 27–8.
- 15 Bachelard, *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, p. 105.
- 16 Compare the funeral orations of the court chaplains Rudbeckius and Botvidi quoted in Lars Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica: Politisk etik och nationellt svärmeri i den tidigare stormaktstidens litteratur* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956) pp. 95–6.
- 17 Reinhart Koselleck, 'Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the *Topos* into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process', in his *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 22.
- 18 A *locus communis* invoked by the Swedish king in 'Gustav Adolf's Own History', a story of the Vasa family he began writing in 1627. See *Konung Gustaf II Adolfs tal och skrifter*, edited by C. Hallendorff (Stockholm: Ljus, 1901) pp. 70–1. Compare Kurt Johannesson, *Gotisk renässans: Johannes och Olaus Magnus som politiker och historiker* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1982) pp. 102–14; and Sven Lundkvist, 'Verklighetsuppfattning och verklighet: en studie i Gustav II Adolfs handlingsramar', in *Studier i äldre historia: tillägnade Herman Schück 5/4 1985* (Stockholm: Minab/Gotab, 1985) p. 231.
- 19 Ong, *Presence of the Word*, p. 114.
- 20 *Ibid.* pp. 215–16.
- 21 Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, translated by H. C. Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) 1356b, pp. 75–6. Compare Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) pp. 13, 21.
- 22 Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, p. 40.
- 23 Compare Marc Bloch, [1923], *The Royal Touch*, translated by J.E. Anderson (New York: Dorset Press, 1989), esp. pp. 177–213. Compare also Montesquieu, [1721], *Lettres persanes* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964) p. 56.
- 24 Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, pp. 83–4.
- 25 Johan Skytte, *Een kort underwijsning uthi hwad konster och dygder en furstelig person skal sigh öfva och bruka*, quoted in Johannesson, 'Gustav Adolf som retoriker', pp. 126–7.
- 26 Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, pp. 124–9.
- 27 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) pp. 230–1.
- 28 Quoted in Leif Åslund, 'Pro et contra och consultatio i 1600-talets svenska riksråd (1626–1658)', *Samlingen*, vol. 110, 1989, pp. 9–10.
- 29 As Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, p. 96, and Åslund, 'Pro et contra och consultatio', p. 11, complain.
- 30 For a discussion, see Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

- 31 On the use of theatre in the education of young noblemen at a college in Uppsala, see Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, pp. 37–8.
- 32 Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, p. 38.
- 33 Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450–1650* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1984) p. 20.
- 34 Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, pp. 56–7; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 253.
- 35 Sverker Arnoldsson, *Krigspropagandan i Sverige före trettioåriga kriget*, Göteborgs högskolas årsskrift, vol. 47, no. 7, 1941 (Göteborg: Wettergren & Kerbers förlag) pp. 6–7.
- 36 Strong, *Art and Power*, p. 97.

### 5. Fighting for a national interest

- 1 The events leading up to the war are exhaustively discussed in Nils Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget* (Stockholm: Nationalförlaget, 1918); Wilhelm Tham, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia: 1:2, 1560–1648* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1960) pp. 160–202. In the following discussion, information not given in the primary sources is derived from these two works.
- 2 Resolution of the Committee of the Diet, 12 January 1628, Arkiv, part 1A, pp. 3–5.
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 3.
- 4 *Ibid.* p. 4.
- 5 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 166–7.
- 6 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 27–8; Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 185–7.
- 7 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 1 April 1628, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, pp. 46–53.
- 8 *Ibid.* pp. 46–7.
- 9 'Rochelle' refers to the Huguenot fortress at La Rochelle which was taken over by Cardinal Richelieu in 1628. See Wedgwood, *Thirty Years War*, pp. 208, 216, 235. 'Prussia' refers to the above-mentioned contingent sent in support of Sigismund.
- 10 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 1 April 1628, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 47.
- 11 *Ibid.* pp. 47–8.
- 12 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, p. 181.
- 13 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 55–70.
- 14 *Ibid.* pp. 59–68; Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 188–90.
- 15 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to the Council, 30 November 1628, Arkiv, part 1A, pp. 6–13.
- 16 *Ibid.* p. 11.
- 17 *Ibid.* p. 13.
- 18 Gustav Adolf's address to the Council, 'One of the Days December 9–12', 1628, published as appendix to Nils Ahnlund, 'Öfverläggningarna i riksrådet

- om tyska kriget 1628–1630', *Historisk tidskrift*, vol. 34, 1914. The exact date of the meeting is not obvious from the protocol.
- 19 *Ibid.* pp. 113–14.
  - 20 *Ibid.* p. 114.
  - 21 Minutes of the Council, 'One of the Days 9–15 December', 1628, *Svenska Riksrådets Protokoll*, edited by N. A. Kullberg (Stockholm: Norstedt & Söner, 1878) vol. I, pp. 123–4. Discussed in Åslund, 'Pro et contra och consultatio', pp. 11–12.
  - 22 As Åslund points out, the exact meaning of this argument is somewhat obscure.
  - 23 Minutes of the Council, 15 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 20–4.
  - 24 *Ibid.* p. 22.
  - 25 *Ibid.* p. 23.
  - 26 *Ibid.*
  - 27 Minutes of the Council, 2 January 1629, published as appendix to Nils Ahnlund, 'Öfverläggningarna i riksrådet om tyska kriget 1628–1630', pp. 117–19. See also Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, pp. 108–9.
  - 28 Minutes of the Council, 2 January 1629, p. 118.
  - 29 *Ibid.*
  - 30 *Ibid.* pp. 118–19.
  - 31 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 192–3.
  - 32 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 70–1.
  - 33 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 183–4.
  - 34 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 5 March 1629, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 29–33.
  - 35 *Ibid.* p. 31.
  - 36 Minutes of the Council, 18 April 1629, *Svenska Riksrådets Protokoll*, vol. I, pp. 126–7. See also Minutes of the Council, 23 April 1629, *ibid.* pp. 128–9.
  - 37 Minutes of the Council, 18 April 1629, *ibid.* p. 127.
  - 38 Letter from Gustav Adolf to the German Estates, 25 April 1629, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 33–7.
  - 39 Resolution of the Diet, 29 June 1629, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 37–41.
  - 40 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, p. 263.
  - 41 Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 42–52.
  - 42 *Ibid.* pp. 43–4.
  - 43 That is, the 'Mantuan war' which pitted the Austrian emperor against the pope and Richelieu's invasion of Italy, both events taking place in 1629. For a discussion, see Wedgwood, *Thirty Years War*, pp. 246–7 and 252–3.
  - 44 I.e. the personal risks the king was taking and the danger the country would be exposed to if he was killed.
  - 45 Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 45.
  - 46 The numbering of these arguments does not correspond to those given in the original documents.
  - 47 *Ibid.* pp. 47–52.
  - 48 *Ibid.* p. 50.

- 49 Minutes of the Council, 3 November 1629, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 53–5.
- 50 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 274–314; Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 194–7.
- 51 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 218–20.
- 52 *Ibid.* p. 369. On the reduction in the Swedish navy stationed at Stralsund as a consequence of these developments, see Axel Oxenstierna's Memorandum for Lars Grubbe, 14 March 1630, Axel Oxenstierna, *Rikskansleren Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brefvexling*, edited by C.G. Styffe (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1888) part I, vol. V, p. 165.
- 53 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 315–58; Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 193–4.
- 54 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to Gustav Adolf, 3 April 1630, *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter*, part I, vol. V, pp. 250–3.
- 55 Minutes of the Council, 4 May 1630, *Svenska Riksrådets protokoll*, vol. II, pp. 1–4.
- 56 *Ibid.* p. 4.
- 57 Resolution in the Diet, 14 May 1630, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 61–4.
- 58 *Ibid.* pp. 629–30.
- 59 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, p. 199.
- 60 Skytte, *Een kort underwijsning uthi hwad konster och dygder en furstelig person skal sigh öfva och bruka*, 1602, quoted in Johannesson, 'Gustav Adolf som retoriker', p. 15; Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, pp. 126–7.
- 61 Compare the king's Instruction to the Council, 15 June 1626, *Svenska Riksrådets protokoll*, vol. I, p. xviii.
- 62 Compare, for example, introductions to letters from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 26 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 40; and 1 April 1628, *ibid.* pp. 46, 48.
- 63 Compare Arnoldsson, *Krigspropagandan i Sverige*, p. 21.
- 64 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 26 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 25.
- 65 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to Gustav Adolf, 2 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 16.
- 66 The debates between the king and the chancellor regarding the campaign of the summer of 1629 are discussed in Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 99–103.
- 67 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to Gustav Adolf, 2 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 16.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 26 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 25–8.
- 70 *Ibid.* p. 26.
- 71 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 26 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 26.
- 72 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 5 March 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 31.

- 73 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to Gustav Adolf, 11 February 1630, *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter*, part I, vol. V, p. 88.
- 74 On this last issue, much discussed in the correspondence between the king and the chancellor during the first months of 1630, see, for example, letters from Axel Oxenstierna to Gustav Adolf, 11 and 28 February 1630, *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter*, part I, vol. V, pp. 87–9; 132–7. Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 4 December 1629, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 538.
- 75 *Sveriges regeringsformer 1634–1809 samt konungaförsäkringar 1611–1800*, edited by Emil Hildebrand (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1891) p. 199. Compare Oxenstierna's admonitions to the Council in letter from Axel Oxenstierna to the Council, 30 November 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 11.
- 76 Meeting of the Council, 3 November 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 56.
- 77 Åslund, 'Pro et contra och consultatio', p. 22; Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, p. 136.
- 78 As he put it, for example, in the Minutes of the Council, 15 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 21.
- 79 See, for example, *ibid.* p. 23.
- 80 Minutes of the Council, 15 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 23.
- 81 For a discussion of the role of the Diet, see Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, pp. 175–250.
- 82 See Englund, *Det hotade huset*, pp. 11–16.
- 83 Compare Instruction to the Council, 19 May 1629, *Svenska Riksrådets protokoll*, vol. I, p. xxxix.
- 84 Resolution of the Diet, 12 January 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 5.
- 85 See, for example, Gustav Adolf's instruction to the Council, 28 April 1628, *Svenska Riksrådets protokoll*, vol. I, p. xxviii; Instruction of 30 May 1630, *ibid.* p. xlv.
- 86 Arnoldsson, *Krigspropagandan i Sverige*, p. 27.
- 87 Meeting of the Diet, 29 June 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 40.
- 88 Quoted in Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, p. 46.
- 89 On the relation between the body metaphor and the estates of the Diet, see Englund, *Det hotade huset*, pp. 25–48.
- 90 Gustav Adolf's address to the Diet, 19 May 1630, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, pp. 628–33. Compare Gustav Adolf's address at the opening of the Diet, 10 March 1625, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, pp. 215–17. See also Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, pp. 136–41. For an English translation, see 'King and Estates: Gustav Adolf's Farewell Speech to the Estates, 19 May, 1630', in *Sweden as a Great Power, 1611–1697: Government, Society, Foreign Policy*, edited and translated by Michael Roberts (London: Edward Arnold, 1968) pp. 13–16.
- 91 Gustav Adolf's speech to the Diet, 19 May 1630, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 631.
- 92 *Ibid.* p. 632.
- 93 Gustav Adolf's speech to the Council of Cities, 26 January 1629, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 312.
- 94 *Ibid.* p. 313.
- 95 Gustav Adolf's speech to the Diet, 19 May 1630, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 632.

- 96 *Ibid.* pp. 632–3.
- 97 The meeting is discussed in a *post scriptum* to the letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 5 March 1629, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, pp. 537–8. See also Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 148ff.
- 98 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, p. 151; Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, p. 183.
- 99 According to the restatement of Kristian's views given in Gustav Adolf's letter to Kristian IV, 17 September 1629, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 604.
- 100 *Ibid.* p. 606.
- 101 The German version is printed as appendix to Oredsson, *Gustav Adolf*, pp. 284–94.
- 102 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, p. 63.
- 103 According to the letter from Axel Oxenstierna to Gustav Adolf, 28 February 1630, *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter*, part I, vol. V, p. 136.
- 104 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, p. 193.
- 105 Meeting of the Council, 15 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 22.
- 106 Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 51.
- 107 Letter from Gustav Adolf to the princes in the Holy Roman Empire, April 25, 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 34.
- 108 Gustav Adolf's proposition to the Diet, 13 December 1627, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 307.
- 109 Demosthenes, *First Olynthiac*, paras. 25, 27. Quoted in Perelman, *Realm of Rhetoric*, p. 73. Compare Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, p. 88.
- 110 Compare letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 1 April 1628, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 50.
- 111 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 26 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 40.
- 112 Roberts, 'Political Objectives'.

## 6. Fighting for a national identity

- 1 Jacob Burckhardt, [1860], *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
- 2 For a discussion, see Koyré, *Monde clos*, pp. 10–11.
- 3 See Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, 'Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1968.
- 4 The main theme of the articles in Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.
- 5 See 'The Discovery of the World and of Man', in Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, vol. II, pp. 279–302.
- 6 Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: the Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) pp. 5–7. Englund discusses social mobility in seventeenth-century Sweden in Englund, *Det hotade huset*, pp. 32–43.
- 7 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 256. Compare Giovanni Pico della



- Mirandola, [1486], 'On the Dignity of Man', in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, edited by Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) p. 225.
- 8 William Shakespeare, [1622], *Othello*, edited by M.R. Ridley (London: Methuen, 1974) act I, scene 3, lines 320–6.
  - 9 Or as Iago realised: 'I am not what I am'; Shakespeare, *Othello*, act I, scene 1, lines 43–66.
  - 10 For a general discussion see Jean Jacquot, 'Le Théâtre du monde', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, vol. 31, 1957, pp. 341–72; Northrop Frye, 'The Stage is All the World', in Frye, *Myth and Metaphor*, pp. 196–211.
  - 11 Sir Walter Raleigh, *Poems*, pp. 51–2, quoted in Greenblatt, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, p. 26.
  - 12 William Shakespeare, [1623], *As You Like It*, edited by Agnes Latham (London: Methuen, 1975) act II, scene 7.
  - 13 Quoted in Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, pp. 140–1.
  - 14 Greenblatt, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, p. 27; compare Pico della Mirandola, 'On the Dignity of Man', p. 223.
  - 15 For a general discussion see Norbert Elias, [1969], *La Société de cour*, translated by Pierre Kamnitzer and Jeanne Etoré (Paris: Flammarion, 1985). On women at court, see Baldesar Castiglione, [1528], *The Book of the Courtier*, translated by Charles S. Singleton (New York: Doubleday, 1959) pp. 201–82.
  - 16 Zedler *Universal Lexicon*, 1736, quoted in Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 9. Compare also Thomas More, [1516], *Utopia*, translated by Paul Turner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) book I, p. 63.
  - 17 Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988) pp. 153–62.
  - 18 Burckhardt discusses 'the modern idea of fame' in Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, vol. I, pp. 151–62; compare Andrea del Castagno's paintings 'Wall with Portraits of Famous Men', 1450, in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
  - 19 Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, pp. 54ff.
  - 20 *Ibid.* pp. 130–272.
  - 21 *Ibid.* p. 69.
  - 22 Englund, *Det hotade huset*, p. 75.
  - 23 Burckhardt, 'The State As a Work of Art', in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, vol. I, pp. 21–142.
  - 24 For an overview, see Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Discoverers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) pp. 82–289.
  - 25 Ong, *Presence of the Word*, p. 296; Boorstin, *The Discoverers*, pp. 100–1.
  - 26 Lloyd A. Brown, [1949], *The Story of Maps* (New York: Dover Books, 1977) pp. 92–100.
  - 27 *Ibid.* p. 97.
  - 28 On Bruno, see, for example, 'Bruno', Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); Koyré, *Monde clos*, pp. 61, 189–227.

- 29 On this transformation in the Swedish context, see Stefan Helmfrid, 'Sveriges kartbild genom 500 år', and Alfred Örbäck, 'Lantmäteriet och dess äldre kartarbeten', both in *Sveriges nationalatlas: Sveriges kartor* (Höganäs: Bra Böcker, 1990).
- 30 Amerigo Vespucci, *New World*, 1555, discussed in Boorstin, *The Discoverers*, p. 153.
- 31 J. H. Elliot, 'The World after Columbus', *New York Review of Books*, 10 October 1991, p. 10.
- 32 Quoted in Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, vol. II, p. 280.
- 33 On the use of perspective in theatre, see Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, pp. 10–11.
- 34 Brown, *Story of Maps*, p. 162.
- 35 Quoted in Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 167.
- 36 Johannesson, 'Gustav Adolf som retoriker', p. 25.
- 37 See Kantorowitz's seminal study, Ernst Kantorowitz, [1951], *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- 38 Ernst Kantorowitz, [1951], 'Mourir pour la patrie (*Pro Patria Mori*) dans la pensée médiévale', in his *Mourir pour la patrie: et autres textes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984) pp. 270–1.
- 39 We find a number of such examples in the source material pertaining to the Swedish intervention. See, for example, Axel Oxenstierna's Memorandum for Lars Grubbe, 30 April 1630, *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter*, part I, vol. V, p. 297 and p. 298; Minutes of the Council, 3 November 1629, pp. 57–8; Proposition to the Council of the Cities, 26 January 1629, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 312.
- 40 Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, pp. 55–61; Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, pp. 159–60; Elliot, 'World after Columbus', p. 10.
- 41 Quentin Skinner, 'The State', in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, edited by Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 102–3.
- 42 Mary Dietz, 'Patriotism', in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, edited by Terence Ball, James Farr and Russell Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 181–2. Swedish use of the term 'regiment' is discussed in Nils Runeby, 'Godh politie och regemente', in *Gustav II Adolf: 350 år efter Lützen* (Stockholm: Livrustkammaren, 1982).
- 43 Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, pp. 140–1.
- 44 On this 'mirror of princes' literature, see, for example, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. II: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p. 33.
- 45 Niccolò Machiavelli, [1532], *The Prince*, translated by Luigi Ricci (New York: New American Library, 1980) p. 33.
- 46 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 123. Compare Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981) p. 35.
- 47 See, for example, Eva Österberg, 'Violence among Peasants: Comparative Perspectives on Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Sweden', in her

- Mentalities and Other Realities* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1991) pp. 89–112.
- 48 Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, pp. 241–50.
- 49 A similar competition of prestige between Italian city-states is described by Burckhardt; see Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, vol. I, pp. 151–62.
- 50 Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, pp. 13–18.
- 51 Compare Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, p. 24; Michael Roberts, *The Swedish Imperial Experience, 1560–1718* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) pp. 19–23.
- 52 The classical study here is Johan Nordström, *De yverbornes ö* (Stockholm: 1934).
- 53 Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, p. 22.
- 54 *Ibid.* p. 33.
- 55 Johannes Magnus, *Swea och Gothia Cronika*, translated by Erico Schrodero (Stockholm: 1620), title page.
- 56 Johannesson, *Gotisk renässans*, pp. 102–14.
- 57 Arnoldsson, *Krigspropagandan i Sverige*, p. 6.
- 58 Gustav Adolf's speech to the Diet, 19 May 1630, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 631.
- 59 Gustav Adolf's 'History', *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, pp. 66–7.
- 60 Treated by a variety of authors; see, for example, Curt Weibull, 'Kung Berig, goterna och Scandza', *Scandia*, 1972; Weibull, 'Gustaf II Adolf', p. 8; Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, pp. 5ff; Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, pp. 204–5.
- 61 Quoted in Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, p. 204.
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 Quoted in Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, p. 34.
- 64 See Ragnar Josephson, *Det hyperboreiska Upsala* (Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1940) pp. 37–61.
- 65 Compare Foucault on the role of Hebrew in the intellectual discussions of the seventeenth century. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 36.
- 66 See Olof Rudbeck's *Atlantica*, 1672, discussed in Nordström, *De yverbornes ö*; Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, pp. 191–220.
- 67 Skinner, *Foundations*, vol. II.
- 68 Nils Runeby, *Monarchia Mixta: Maktfördelningsdebatt i Sverige under den tidiga stormaktstiden* (Uppsala: Studia Historica Upsaliensia, 1962) pp. 134–49. Skinner, *Foundations*, vol. II, pp. 14–15.
- 69 Ingun Montgomery, 'Gustav Adolf och religionen', in *Gustav II Adolf: 350 år efter Lützen* (Stockholm: Livrustkammaren, 1982) p. 62.
- 70 Arnoldsson, *Krigspropagandan i Sverige*, pp. 6–7. See also Hjalmar Holmquist, *Svenska kyrkans historia*, vol. IV, part I (Stockholm: Svenska Diakonistyrelsens bokförlag, 1938) pp. 189–90; Montgomery, 'Gustav Adolf och religionen', pp. 68–9.
- 71 Quoted in Montgomery, 'Gustav Adolf och religionen', pp. 68–9.

- 72 Gustav Adolf's 'History', in *Gustaf Adolfs Skrifter*, p. 74.
- 73 *Ibid.*
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- 75 Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, p. 306; Montgomery, 'Gustav Adolf och religionen', p. 68. Compare, for example, Petrus Kenecius, 'En nödhtorffigh förmaningh', 1621, quoted in Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, p. 91; and Melancthon on the Anabaptists in Skinner, *Foundations*, vol. II, p. 80.
- 76 Compare Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, p. 90.
- 77 Gustav Adolf's address to the Diet, 19 May 1630, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 632.
- 78 For a discussion, see Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, pp. 316–19; Montgomery, 'Gustav Adolf och religionen', pp. 72–3; Arnoldsson, *Krigspropagandan i Sverige*.
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- 80 Arnoldsson, *Krigspropagandan i Sverige*, p. 12.
- 81 Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, pp. 297–346.
- 82 *Ibid.*
- 83 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 319–20.
- 84 *Ibid.*, pp. 325–6.
- 85 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 26 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 26.
- 86 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to Gustav Adolf, 11 February 1630, *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter*, part I, vol. V, p. 86.
- 87 Axel Oxenstierna's Memorandum for Lars Grubbe, 30 April 1630, *Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter*, part I, vol. V, p. 296; Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 50.
- 88 Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 59.
- 89 Quoting Gustav Adolf's speech to the Norwegians during the war with Denmark, quoted in Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, p. 315.
- 90 Compare Englund, *Det hotade huset*, pp. 34–5; and for a more general argument, Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, pp. 55–8.
- 91 Proposition to the Diet, December 1627, in *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 297.
- 92 Gustav Adolf's speech at the opening of the Diet, 28 January 1617, *Gustav Adolfs skrifter*, p. 13.
- 93 Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, in Arkiv, part IA, p. 53.
- 94 Letter from Gustav Adolf to the German princes, 25 April 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 34.
- 95 Gustav Adolf's speech to the Diet, 13 December 1627, in *Gustav Adolfs skrifter*, p. 456.
- 96 Letter from Axel Oxenstierna to the members of the Council, 30 November 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 13. See also Englund, *Det hotade huset*, p. 28; Strindberg, *Bondenöd och stormaktsdröm*, p. 42.

- 97 Strong, *Art and Power*, pp. 75–6.
- 98 Reinhart Koselleck, 'Modernity and the Planes of Historicity', in his *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 6.
- 99 Matthew, 22:21.
- 100 Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, Arkiv, part IA, pp. 46–7.
- 101 Hugo Grotius, *De iure belli ac pacis*, 1625, book II, chapter 22:13, published in excerpts as Hugo Grotius, [1625], 'On the Law of War and Peace', in *The Theory of International Relations: Selected Texts from Gentili to Treitschke*, edited by M. G. Forsyth, H. M. A. Keens-Soper and P. Savigear (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970) pp. 37–85.
- 102 To paraphrase Skinner in Skinner, *Foundations*, vol. II, p. 196.
- 103 On this theme in Gustav Vasa's propaganda, see Johannesson, *Svensk retorik*, p. 50.
- 104 Letter for the prayer day of 1623, quoted in Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, p. 317.
- 105 Reinhart Koselleck, 'Modernity and the Planes of Historicity', p. 6.
- 106 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 123.
- 107 Compare Kantorowitz, 'Mourir pour la patrie', pp. 117–21.
- 108 For an exhaustive treatment, see the articles in *Hugo Grotius and International Relations*, edited by Hedley Bull, Benedict Kingsbury and Adam Roberts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990). For a discussion on earlier contributions, see, for example, James Brown Scott, *The Spanish Origin of International Law*, vol. I: *Francisco de Vitoria and his Law of Nations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934).
- 109 Grotius, 'On the Law of War and Peace', book II, chapter I, § 17.
- 110 Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, pp. 62–3.
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- 112 Compare Erik Ringmar, 'The Relevance of International Law: A Hegelian Interpretation of a Peculiar 17th Century Preoccupation', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1995.
- 113 *Handlingar rörande Skandinaviens historia*, vol. VIII, pp. 24, 38, quoted in Gustafsson, *Virtus Politica*, p. 85.
- 114 According to Hedley Bull, 'The Importance of Grotius', in Bull, Kingsbury and Roberts, eds., *Hugo Grotius and International Relations*, p. 75.
- 115 Meeting of the Council, 3 November 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 60.
- 116 Grotius, 'On the Law of War and Peace', book III, chapter 17, § 3.1.
- 117 On Grotius' view of non-intervention, see R. J. Vincent, 'Human Rights and Intervention', in Bull, Kingsbury and Roberts, eds., *Hugo Grotius and International Relations*, pp. 243–51.
- 118 Grotius, 'On the Law of War and Peace', book II, chapter 25, § 8.1. Compare Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, [1762], book I, chapter 2, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II (Paris: Seuil, 1967) p. 519.
- 119 Grotius, 'On the Law of War and Peace', Prolegomena, 24.
- 120 *Ibid.* book II, chapter 25, § 8.2–3.

- 121 For an introduction see Adda B. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960) pp. 475–6; James Der Derian, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987) pp. 106–10.
- 122 The history of Renaissance diplomacy is treated in Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London: Cape, 1955). See also Bozeman, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 438–513.
- 123 Bozeman, *Politics and Culture*, pp. 480–3.
- 124 *Ibid.* pp. 499–504.
- 125 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 10–11. In fact, Hugo Grotius even served in the capacity of Swedish ambassador to the French court in the 1630s. For a discussion, see C. G. Roelofsen, 'Grotius and the International Politics of the Seventeenth Century', in Bull, Kingsbury and Roberts, eds., *Hugo Grotius and International Relations*, pp. 127–31.
- 126 J. H. Shennan, *The Origins of the Modern European State, 1450–1725* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1974) p. 34. Bozeman, *Politics and Culture*, p. 489.
- 127 Compare Der Derian, *On Diplomacy*.
- 128 Compare, for example, François de Callières, *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains*, discussed in Adam Watson, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1982) p. 102.
- 129 For examples, see Der Derian, *On Diplomacy*, p. 114; Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, pp. 10–11; Watson, *Diplomacy*, p. 103.
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- 131 See, for example, instruction to the Council, 16 July 1621, *Svenska Riksrådets protokoll*, p. v; instruction to the Council, 19 May 1629, *Svenska Riksrådets protokoll*, p. xli.
- 132 Instruction regarding the visit of a *legatus* from the Grand-duke of Russia. See Instruction to the Council, 15 June 1626, *Svenska Riksrådets protokoll*, p. xvi.
- 133 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, p. 179; compare Englund, *Det hotade huset*, pp. 71–2.
- 134 Tham, *Svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, pp. 35–6, 90.
- 135 *Ibid.* p. 81; Runeby, 'Godh politie och regemente', p. 79.
- 136 Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, p. 51.
- 137 Minutes of the Council, 27 October 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 51 and p. 58.
- 138 *Ibid.* p. 28.
- 139 Letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 18 February 1629, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 524.
- 140 Skinner, 'The State', pp. 91–3.
- 141 For some examples, see meeting in the Council, 15 December 1628, Arkiv, part IA, p. 23; meeting of the Council, 3 November 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 60; resolution of the Diet, 14 May 1630, Arkiv, part IA, p. 62; letter from Gustav Adolf to Axel Oxenstierna, 8 October 1630, *Gustav Adolfs skrifter*, pp. 57–8.



- 142 Minutes of the Council, 3 November 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 60.
- 143 See, for example, Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 26–7.
- 144 Minutes of the Council, 3 November 1629, Arkiv, part IA, p. 60.
- 145 Allan Ellenius, 'Gustav Adolf i bildkonsten: från *Miles Christianus* till nationell frihetssymbol', in *Gustav II Adolf: 350 år efter Lützen* (Stockholm: Livrustkammaren, 1982) p. 93.
- 146 Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, p. 318.
- 147 Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, pp. 225–6.
- 148 Ahnlund, *Gustav Adolf den store*, pp. 327–8.
- 149 Gustav Adolf's address to the opening of the Diet, 10 March 1625, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, p. 213.
- 150 Gustav Adolf's address to the Diet, January 1627, *Gustaf Adolfs skrifter*, pp. 296–8; quotation on p. 298.
- 151 *Ibid.* p. 298.
- 152 Quoted in Ahnlund, *Gustaf Adolf inför tyska kriget*, p. 63.
- 153 Quoted in *ibid.* p. 177.
- 154 *Ibid.* pp. 137, 160–1.
- 155 On this last fear, see *ibid.* pp. 267–8.
- 156 Quoted in Jean Hampton, 'Hobbesian Reflections on Glory as a Cause of Conflict', in *The Causes of Quarrel: Essays on Peace, War, and Thomas Hobbes*, edited by Peter Caws (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) p. 114.
- 157 *Ibid.* p. 31.

### Conclusion: the end of the story?

- 1 I discuss this Hegelian point in Ringmar, 'Relevance of International Law', especially pp. 102–3.
- 2 Compare Honneth, 'Integrity and Disrespect'.
- 3 On the pursuit of wealth, see Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 50; on why people work, see Fukuyama, 'Thymotic Origins of Work', in his *End of History*, pp. 223–34; on love see Pizzorno, 'Other Kinds of Otherness', pp. 358–9.
- 4 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, pp. 174–5.
- 5 Francis Fukuyama, 'The Last Man', in his *End of History*, pp. 287–339.
- 6 Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. 387; Jean François Lyotard, *La Condition post-moderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979). Compare also Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 23–43.
- 7 Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, for example pp. 3–31.

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